# Course report 2024

## National 5 Spanish

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

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# Grade boundary and statistical information

## Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023:          5,898

Number of resulted entries in 2024:          6,520

## Statistical information: performance of candidates

### Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

| A | Number of candidates | 3,787 | Percentage | 58.1 | Cumulative percentage | 58.1 | Minimum mark required | 85 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **B** | Number of candidates | 1,031 | Percentage | 15.8 | Cumulative percentage | 73.9 | Minimum mark required | 72 |
| **C** | Number of candidates | 788 | Percentage | 12.1 | Cumulative percentage | 86.0 | Minimum mark required | 60 |
| **D** | Number of candidates | 543 | Percentage | 8.3 | Cumulative percentage | 94.3 | Minimum mark required | 47 |
| **No award** | Number of candidates | 371 | Percentage | 5.7 | Cumulative percentage | 100 | Minimum mark required | N/A |

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the statistics and information page of our website.

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# Section 1: comments on the assessment

## Question paper 1: Reading

The reading paper contained a good range of topics across the three texts. It covered the contexts of learning (text 1, discussing the positive aspects of school holidays), employability (text 2, digital nomads) and culture (text 3, how people celebrate Pan American Day). The topics were relevant, and the vocabulary and grammar assessed were in line with the National 5 course specification. There were questions of high, average and lower demand across the three texts. As in previous years, there were few questions where candidates were unable to supply a response.

The questions following each of the three texts were clearly worded and accessible to candidates, making it straightforward for most candidates to locate the answers in the text. The supported questions worked well, especially question 3(b)(i), where most candidates gained the mark.

Many candidates performed well, demonstrating good reading skills and achieving high marks.

## Question paper 1: Writing

The writing question paper, which is always on the context of employability, required candidates to reply by email to a job advert. As part of the assessment, candidates should address the six bullet points relating to information in the job advert: four predictable bullet points and two unpredictable bullet points.

The unpredictable bullet points were 'any previous visits to Spain' and 'when you are available for interview'. Both unpredictable bullet points were relevant to the job advert and accessible for candidates.

Many candidates performed as expected in this question paper, showing that they had prepared well.

## Question paper 2: Listening

In the listening paper, there was a good level of challenge and demand in terms of the content and the questions. The topics were familiar and there was a range of vocabulary across the two items.

The question paper covered the context of society. After each item, candidates answered questions in English. The content and questions were accessible for candidates. The supported questions worked well, especially question 2(b), where most candidates gained both marks. Most candidates coped well with the vocabulary in the context of society.

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## Assignment–writing

This assignment–writing was reinstated this session.

Candidates cover one context from society, learning or culture, and choose the title of their assignment. Candidates generally performed very well and covered a wide range of topics relating to the contexts.

## Performance–talking

The performance–talking performed as expected.

Candidates carry out a spoken presentation and take part in a conversation directly after. Centres are familiar with how this coursework task works, and it is the same format year on year.

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# Section 2: comments on candidate performance

## Areas that candidates performed well in

### Question paper 1: Reading

Candidates performed well across all three texts, with a good distribution of marks. There was a high level of response in the reading question paper, with little evidence of candidates being unable to complete the paper in the allocated time.

Most candidates performed well and were able to provide detail in their answers using qualifiers, adjectives and adverbs. Most candidates correctly translated *el descanso físico y emocional* (physical and emotional rest) in question 1(a)(ii) and *su paisaje increíble* (its incredible landscape) in question 2(b).

Many candidates could provide the detail required in question 2(a) *vivir en diferentes lugares del mundo* (stay in different places around the world), *disfrutar de una buena calidad de vida* (enjoy a good quality of life) and *conocer una gran variedad de culturas* (get to know a variety of cultures). Questions 1(a)(i), 2(c)(ii), (d)(i) and 3(b)(ii) were all answered very well by many candidates.

In question 1(d), there was good evidence of accurate recognition by many candidates of *conocimientos más profundos* (deeper knowledge). In question 1(c), most candidates were familiar with *el medio ambiente* (environment), although a few mistranslated *respetar* (to respect) as 'protect' or 'help', which is incorrect. Many candidates showed good understanding of the phrase *todos estamos en el mismo barco* (we are all in the same boat) in question 3(c)(ii).

Candidates showed confidence and expertise in using the dictionary to help them recognise less familiar verbs and phrases. They coped well in understanding familiar language in a less familiar context.

### Question paper 1: Writing

In the writing question paper, the overall quality in many responses was high, not only in the first four bullet points, but also in the way candidates attempted to address the last two bullet points. There were many examples of detailed language, range of structure and high levels of accuracy. Many candidates were able to show that they had prepared well and were able to use conjunctions and adjectival agreement accurately, as well as a range of tenses and vocabulary structures. Very few candidates did not attempt this paper, and most candidates addressed the two unpredictable bullet points.

As in previous years, most candidates wrote a well-structured email, which was relevant to the job advert, containing language and structures that are appropriate to the level. There was less evidence of long lists of nouns and repetition, and more candidates continue to produce a varied and succinct piece of writing.

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Some candidates used a good range of language and structures in bullet points 1 to 4, for example *tengo quince años, pero pronto tendré dieciséis años* (I am 15 years old, but I will soon be 16 years old), *me dicen que me llevo bien con todo el mundo* (I'm told that I get on with everyone) and *mi jefe me dijo que soy muy trabajador* (my boss told me I am very hardworking). This is good practice. Some candidates included detailed and complex language and structures more appropriate to Higher, but this is not required to achieve full marks at this level.

Many candidates addressed bullet point 5 successfully (any previous visits to Spain) and there was evidence of additional detail from some candidates. Many showed confidence in using the past tense, either the preterite tense *fui* (I went) or the perfect tense *he visitado* (I have visited). Some candidates answered this bullet point in the present tense or in the future tense by saying *No, pero voy a ir a España este año* (No, but I am going to go to Spain this year). Candidates included relevant time phrases, for example *el año pasado* (last year) and a few were able to use first-person plural, for example mi familia *y yo vamos de vacaciones cada año a Mallorca* (my family and I go on holiday to Mallorca every year) and provided additional detail, commenting that they liked going to Spain *y me gusta mucho ir a España* (and I really like going to Spain).

In bullet point 6 (when you are available for interview), some candidates answered this by using the structure 'I am available' (*estoy disponible*) followed by a day or date. A few candidates used the structure 'I can attend an interview' (*puedo asistir a una entrevista*) followed by a day or date or a phrase about the completion of their exams.


## Question paper 2: Listening

Most candidates performed well in the following questions:

♦ question 1(a): understanding the adjectives *tolerantes* (tolerant) and *generosos* (generous)

♦ question 1(d): understanding the adjective *simpáticos* (nice) and the qualifier *bastante* (quite)

♦ question 2(a): understanding *la piscina* (the swimming pool)

♦ question 2(c): understanding *es bueno para mi salud mental* (it is good for my mental health)

♦ question 2(d): many candidates provided the detail required for both marks in this question, *no tengo tiempo para estudiar* (I don't have time to study), *no es posible tener un trabajo a tiempo parcial* (it is not possible to have a part-time job) or *no puedo ir a fiestas con mis amigos* (I can't go to parties with my friends)

♦ question 2(e): understanding *cereales* (cereal) or *un plátano* (a banana)

♦ question 2(f)(ii): understanding *palomitas* (popcorn) or *caramelos* (sweets)

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## Assignment–writing

Most candidates submitted very good pieces of writing. There was a good range of topics from each of the three contexts of society, learning and culture, for example family, friendship, healthy living, ICT, school, holidays, town, media, environment and film. Most candidates used detailed language, which was appropriate to the level, with some very good examples where candidates included detail and complex language and structures that were more appropriate to Higher. However, this is not required to achieve full marks at this level. Most candidates showed high levels of accuracy throughout.

The overall presentation of candidates' work was very good, and most had ticked the relevant box in the answer booklet for the context chosen and included a title in English. Most candidates had well-structured essays and used a good range of vocabulary, including time phrases and a variety of tenses. Most candidates were able to express both positive and negative ideas and opinions and many were able to give reason for these opinions.

The recommended word length for assignment–writing is 120 to 200 words, and some candidates went beyond this, but most were able to maintain high accuracy and provide a good range of detailed information and opinions. However, this is not the recommended approach as exceeding the word length can be problematic for candidates.

## Performance–talking

The overall quality of candidates' performances sampled this session was good.

Many candidates performed very well in the presentation. Many candidates were awarded pegged marks 10 or 8. This is as expected as this section of the performance can be carefully prepared ahead of the assessment.

Candidates coped well in the conversation, and most were awarded pegged marks 12 or 9. Most candidates sustained the conversation well, despite errors, and were awarded 5 or 3 marks for this. Very few candidates were awarded 1 or 0 marks for sustaining the conversation.

Candidates differentiated their task both before and during their performance, and this is evident in the flow of their performance and the structure of their conversational responses.

Candidates' willingness to seek clarification in Spanish has become a routine feature of performances and creates an impression of being at ease with the task.

# Areas that candidates found demanding

## Question paper 1: Reading

There was an element of detail required in many of the answers, which some candidates did not provide. There were many examples of poor spelling in English.

Some candidates missed marks by not providing qualifiers or other detail in their answers, or by not looking closely enough at the detail in the text. Candidates did not always think about the context of the word. A few clearly guessed the answer without checking the meaning in the dictionary, for example:

**Text 1**
- question 1(a): a few candidates mistranslated *levantarse temprano* (get up early) as 'wake up early' (*despertarse temprano*)
- question 1(d): some candidates mixed up the adjectives and nouns, instead of translating *otros retos* (other challenges) and *asignaturas distintas* (different subjects), they wrote 'different challenges' and 'other subjects', and did not gain either mark

**Text 2**
- question 2(b): *hace sol todo el año* (it is sunny all year). Some candidates mistranslated the weather as 'hot' or 'warm' and some answered, 'it is sunny every year' or 'it is sunny all day', which are both incorrect
- question 2(c)(i): *descubrir los últimos avances tecnológicos* (discover the latest technological advances). Some candidates mistranslated *últimos* as 'ultimate'
- question 2(d)(ii): *más de un millón de trabajadores internacionales* (more than a million international workers). Many candidates missed the detail 'more than' before the number, and some candidates gave *trabajadores* as 'jobs' (*trabajos*)

**Text 3**
- question 3(a): *promover el intercambio cultural* (promote cultural exchange). Some candidates thought that *intercambio* was 'swap', which was not correct in this context
- question 3(b)(ii): some candidates gave answers close to the correct answer, but were either too vague, too specific or the answer did not make sense. For example, writing 'lack of justice' for *la justicia* (justice), 'right-handed humans' for *los derechos humanos* (human rights), 'the poor' for *la pobreza* (poverty) and 'changed climate' for *el cambio climático* (climate change)
- question 3(c)(i): a lot of detail was required in each of the possible answers and some candidates did not provide enough to gain the marks. Many candidates gave *países* (countries) as 'places', which is incorrect and some thought *fiestas* (festivals) was 'parties', which is incorrect in this context

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## Question paper 1: Writing

Some candidates had not prepared for bullet points 1 to 4 as well as in previous years and a few candidates found the unpredictable bullet points challenging.

In bullet point 6 (when you are available for interview), some candidates misunderstood this and answered by saying when they could start the job (*puedo empezar…*) rather than when they could attend an interview.

In terms of content and language resource, most candidates are comfortable with the requirements for the writing question paper. However, accuracy continues to be the main challenge for some candidates, both in the predictable and unpredictable bullet points, and in particular accuracy with verbs.

Poor dictionary use, mother tongue and/or other language interference, and literal translations of idiomatic phrases were again the three main factors affecting accuracy. Some candidates showed very poor spelling and there was confusion with common words like *es* (is), *el* (the) and *en* (in).

Other areas candidates found demanding included:

♦ when addressing bullet point 2 (describing school, college, education experience until now), a few candidates continue to write a long list of subjects, which should be avoided, and a few described the school building, for example *mi instituto es grande* (my school is big), rather than details of their education experience
♦ omitting essential accents or adding accents to words when they are not required
♦ instances of poor spelling of high frequency words such as *Escocia* (Scotland) and *España* (Spain)
♦ confusion with *ser* (to be) and *estar* (to be), especially in the phrase 'I am available', which should be *estoy disponible*
♦ conjugating verbs in the first-person present tense, as some candidates wrongly used infinitives
♦ creating an accurate sentence in the perfect tense, as some candidates used the wrong auxiliary verb and should have written *he visitado* (I have visited) and not *tengo visitado*
♦ not including a verb when addressing the unpredictable bullet points, as a few candidates simply wrote *julio* (July) for bullet point 6, which was not enough
♦ in the two unpredictable bullet points, a few candidates omitted both of these and were awarded 12 marks as a maximum, in line with the detailed marking instructions. Some candidates did not address one of the unpredictable bullet points and were awarded 16 marks as a maximum
♦ a few candidates who did not manage to produce an acceptable job application. In some cases, they produced a long piece of writing that did not meet the criteria to gain 12 marks due to lack of accuracy or, in a small number of cases, a few lines were written that were accurate, but not enough detail was provided for the level

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## Question paper 2: Listening

There was a lack of accuracy in candidate responses, for example:

♦ question 1(b): this was challenging for many candidates, with only some gaining the mark for any of the possible answers: *me trata como un niño pequeño* (she treats me like a child), *nunca pasa tiempo conmigo* (she never spends time with me) and *a ella no le interesa hablar conmigo* (she is not interested in talking to me)

♦ question 1(c)(ii): some candidates did not include the verb in the following answers or mixed up the verbs, and this prevented them from gaining the mark: *jugamos videojuegos* (we play video games), *vemos partidos de fútbol* (we watch football matches) and *vamos al polideportivo* (we go to the sports centre)

♦ question 1(d): a few candidates gave *ruidosos* (loud) as 'rude', which is incorrect

♦ question 2(c): some candidates gave *emocionante* (exciting) as 'emotional' and this is incorrect. Some candidates did not include *muchos* (lots of) in the answer *tengo muchos amigos* (I have lots of friends)

♦ question 2(g): this was challenging for many candidates, with only some candidates gaining the mark for both *un hotel de lujo* (a luxury hotel) and *en el campo* (in the countryside)

As in the reading paper, there were examples of poor spelling and expression in English; however, candidates were not penalised for this.

## Assignment–writing

Most candidates produced a piece of writing that fulfilled the criteria relating to 12, 16 or 20 marks. Candidates that achieved less than 12 marks were often repetitive in their use of expression or included excessive listing. A greater range of expression and more accuracy were required. Common errors included wrong adjectival agreement, gender, verb endings, or lack of consistency in spelling. A few candidates failed to communicate their ideas by missing out key words. There were frequent errors of punctuation and accents in a few instances.

There were a few common errors in Spanish, for example *no me gusta* (I don't like) requires *ni* (nor) instead of *y* (and) when listing further information, *estoy en cuarto* and *estoy en el cuarto curso* are both acceptable ways of expressing 'I am in 4th year', but some candidates wrongly combined the two and some candidates omitted accents in verb expressions, when they are required, for example *me gustó* (I liked it).

To achieve full marks, candidates need to write in an organised and structured way, expressing a range of ideas and opinions. There needs to be a good degree of grammatical accuracy using detailed language throughout, including a wide range of structures and/or verbs.

Some candidates started off well, but then they were unable to maintain the high levels of accuracy and range of detailed language. In some cases, this was due to them going beyond the recommended word length of 120 to 200 words.

In other assignments, candidates did not go into enough depth in the topic they had chosen and then went on to discuss another topic, which was not relevant to their chosen title.

There were a few examples where candidates had written the title in Spanish or had not included a title at all. There were a few examples where the piece of writing did not relate to the title.

## Performance–talking

A few candidates found the level of grammatical accuracy and sustaining this throughout the performance difficult. Weaker performances by candidates often included errors that detracted from the overall impression. Some candidates made more serious errors, for example problems with the gender of nouns, incorrect agreement of adjectives, problems with verb conjugation and tenses, missing words, or incorrect word order.

In some performances, pronunciation and intonation were not always sufficiently accurate to be readily understood by a speaker of the language and this detracted from the overall quality of the performance.

Some candidates found the conversation part of the performance more demanding as it is less predictable and involves a series of questions. Most candidates at this level were awarded a pegged mark of 12 or lower for this section.

# Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ read questions carefully, then respond by giving the correct amount of information, ensuring that enough detail is given, as required at National 5

♦ know that if qualifiers are in the text, they should appear in the answer

♦ refer to the detailed marking instructions for reading, writing and listening (available in the National 5 Spanish past papers on SQA's website) as these show the level of detail required for answers. Candidates should be familiar with the approach behind these, for example where a candidate should provide detail to access the full range of marks

♦ make their handwriting legible

♦ indicate on their answer booklet if they are using the additional pages to write answers, for example by writing an asterisk (*)

♦ regularly practise answering exam-type questions with a similar structure and standard to the course assessment

## Question paper 1: Reading

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ are familiar with, and recognise the structures, grammar, and detailed language appropriate for this level

♦ are able to translate common verbs, for example *aprender* (to learn), *conocer* (to get to know), *hacer* (to do/to make), and *vivir* (to live) and common nouns, for example *padres* (parents/fathers), *hijos* (children and/or sons), *lugares* (places), *países* (countries) and *fiestas* (festivals or parties), especially with the use of a dictionary

♦ continue to develop dictionary skills as part of the course and think about the context of a word to decide which meaning is most appropriate

♦ know they must translate the whole answer, for example right to the end of the sentence

## Question paper 1: Writing

Teachers and lecturers should continue to ensure candidates:

♦ develop ways of addressing the first four predictable bullet points that allow them to use a range of vocabulary and structures, as well as applying knowledge of verbs and tenses

♦ are able to provide at least one accurate sentence for each of the two unpredictable bullet points and this should contain a verb

♦ practise manipulating the language in a range of unfamiliar bullet points

♦ know that they do not have to provide a long formal introduction and/or end to the job application, as this can prevent candidates from performing well in the required areas of the job application

♦ avoid writing long lists and write legibly

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- be accurate in using the infinitive after certain verb phrases, for example *me gustaría* (I would like to), *voy a* (I am going to) and *para* (in order to)
- take time to check spelling and accents in a bilingual dictionary

## Question paper 2: Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- are familiar with a range of basic vocabulary from the four contexts of society, learning, employability, culture
- have knowledge of words and phrases, including a good range of adjectives, and know and understand a range of tenses and verb forms
- have opportunities to practise listening to Spanish using equipment as in the exam
- pay attention to detail, and are familiar with qualifiers, for example *muy* (very), *mucho* (lots of) and *bastante* (quite) and comparatives, for example *más* (more) and *menos* (less) so they can include this detail in their answers
- are familiar with time phrases, for example *normalmente* (normally), *nunca* (never), *tres veces a la semana* (three times a week), *los martes* (on Tuesdays), *los viernes* (on Fridays), *a veces* (sometimes) and *este fin de semana* (this weekend)
- have knowledge of common verbs, for example *ir de compras* (to go shopping), *ver* (to see or to watch), *jugar* (to play), *pasar* (to spend time) and *hablar* (to talk) and are familiar with some less common modal verbs, for example *puedo* (I can) and *quiere* (he or she wants to)
- tick the correct number of boxes in supported questions, as a few candidates missed marks due to ticking too few or too many boxes

## Assignment–writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- have a strong focus on one of the contexts and a specific topic
- have good structure, include a range of ideas, opinions with reasons and not write long lists of nouns and verbs
- include a clear introduction and conclusion
- include conjunctions where appropriate, a range of verbs, verb forms and some tenses
- include paragraphs, and make sure the title (in English) clearly relates to the content
- complete the assignments in pen, and make sure they are submitted without any teacher or lecturer annotations

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# Performance–talking

Some performances were significantly shorter than the recommended duration and, at times, this meant that candidates did not always have the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in using detailed language or a wide enough variety of language structures.

Teachers and lecturers should continue to include grammar practice and coverage of the rules of the language as an integral part of learning and teaching. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use a variety of persons and tenses, where appropriate.

Many confident performances demonstrated very good language resource. In some instances, candidates did not use enough detailed language, and this detracted from the overall quality. For information on the level of language, teachers and lecturers can refer to the productive grammar grid in the appendix of the National 5 Modern Languages Course Specification and the Understanding Standards examples of National 5 performances available on SQA's secure website.

In the conversation section, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates have strategies for asking for clarification or questions to be repeated, or language structures and phrases to use when they have not understood any aspect of the conversation. Candidates who were able to use interjections and ask relevant questions could sustain the conversation more confidently.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates practise talking skills in preparation for the performance–talking. The 'Approaches to learning and teaching: talking' section in appendix 1 of the National 5 Modern Languages Course Specification provides examples of how to develop candidates' talking skills and suggests talking activities as part of learning and teaching.

# Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in March 2024 and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

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grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report.