

# EDINBURGH LEARNS

## Guidance on SQA Alternative Certification Model (ACM)

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## Introduction

The Scottish Government has decided that National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams will not go ahead this school session 2020-21. This is due to ongoing concerns about the impact of Covid-19 and the need to ensure that there is fairness and equity for all of Scotland's young people.

The Alternative Certification Model (ACM) aims to ensure fair and credible results for all learners undertaking National Qualifications. Provisional results submitted to SQA in June 2021 will be supported by robust quality assurance carried out by each school, The City of Edinburgh Council and SQA. This will ensure that a National 5 awarded in the north of Scotland is of the same standard as one which is awarded in the south of Scotland and everywhere in between. The ACM for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher will follow a similar process.

SQA published broad guidance entitled "National Courses: guidance on gathering evidence and producing estimates" in October 2020: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/95281.html>

More detailed guidance on the roles and responsibilities of teachers, schools and local authorities regarding SQA Quality Assurance for the National Qualifications 2021 is available here: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/96762.html>

The National Qualifications 2021 (NQ21) Group was set up to support the development of the ACM nationally. It includes representatives from a range of key stakeholders including Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), the National Parent Forum of Scotland, SQA and Schools Leaders Scotland (SLS).

Edinburgh officers have been liaising with local authority colleagues across Scotland, via ADES and the SEIC, and have been supported well by our SQA Liaison Manager. The quality improvement team convened working groups with key stakeholders including, Secondary school senior and middle leaders, ASL service, parents and teaching unions, to co-produce advice on different aspects of ACM implementation:

- Quality Assurance and Assessment approaches
- Moderation and Lead Teacher Networks
- Assessment Arrangements
- Learner & Parent/Carer Communications

Information is shared via regular updates with the following networks:

- SQA Coordinators
- Lead teachers (including Subject and Support for Learning leaders)
- Senior Leaders (HT and DHT)

The following guidance brings together the range of national and local advice shared previously with schools (see Appendix). We wish to acknowledge and thank all those who have contributed to this collaborative process.

## ACM Implementation Timeline

The revised alternative certification model is based on five key stages:

### Stage 1: ongoing until April 2021

Teachers access subject specific guidance, assessment resources and Understanding Standards materials and webinars from SQA.

- Ensure all staff have engaged with the SQA's alternative certification model documentation, including Understanding Standards activity.
- Provide clarity to young people on what pieces of evidence will inform their provisional grade for each subject; the weighting of each piece of evidence; and the timeline for assessment.
- Agree school approach to assessment (this could include subject-specific variances).
- Share with staff teams the agreed approach for internal verification.
- HT meets with QIEO/QIM to discuss previous patterns of attainment (**by end of March**).

### Stage 2: April - May 2021

School and local authority quality assurance continues. During May, SQA requests, reviews and provides feedback on assessment evidence from each school, college and training provider.

- SQA will determine which subjects/levels are sampled.
- SQA will liaise with schools to agree how evidence will be submitted (either by post/uplift or by electronic copy).
- It is accepted that evidence will only be partial at this point.
- Local Authority Subject Moderation is ongoing, including on **Framework Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May**.

### Stage 3: end May to 25 June 2021

Schools, colleges, training providers, local authorities and SQA work through final stages of local and national quality assurance and feedback, to reach provisional results that are consistent, equitable and fair.

- By **Friday 11 June** – Staff agree provisional grades in school
- No new timetable for existing Senior Phase prior to Mon 14 June.
- From **Mon 14 June** – Final in-school QA and discussions with QIEO/QIM ahead of sign-off.
- Week beginning 14 June can still be used to assess pupils who may have been absent etc. if necessary.
- Additional Assessment Day for teachers to engage with the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) on **25<sup>th</sup> May and 9<sup>th</sup> June**.
- Local Authority Subject Moderation is ongoing.

### Stage 4: by 25 June 2021

Schools, colleges and training providers submit quality assured provisional results to SQA.

Stage 5: Appeals process for 2020–21 – To be advised following consultation.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality Assurance documentation for school level, including sign-off by staff at each level (**Appendix One**).

As per the timeline above, QIEOs are meeting with Head Teachers before Easter and will also meet in June for final sign-off.

Support at subject level via Lead Teacher networks is ongoing (this includes support from SEIC for some subjects).

Guidance for Lead Teachers has been shared and can be found in **Appendix Two**.

We will work with schools to develop effective support for moderation at the centre, which will include sharing data on prior attainment and looking at provisional patterns of attainment for this session. More details of this will follow in due course.

### SQA Guidance on Key Roles and Responsibilities

<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/96762.html>

This link takes you to more detailed guidance on the responsibilities of teachers, schools and local authorities regarding SQA Quality Assurance for the National Qualifications 2021.

### Education Scotland's support for Digital Quality Assurance of National Qualifications

Using Microsoft Teams and OneNote, learner evidence can be curated and shared with peers. Discussion around learner evidence can be done asynchronously or live, with the results of the discussion recorded in text, video or voice notes. Every member of the team will be able to access the record of quality assurance to enable them to make judgements about their own learners. You can find out more about this process here:

<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/digilearn/2021/02/19/digital-quality-assurance-of-national-qualifications/>

## Assessment Guidelines

This takes account of the national guidance and sets out best practice for the creation and validation of assessment and how schools will undertake moderation to ensure a shared understanding of standards and expectations. It has been agreed by the Scottish Government that two additional in-service days will be set aside for teachers to work on assessments this year.

### Assessment evidence

On 8 December the Deputy First Minister outlined to Parliament that National Qualifications in 2020-2021 will be awarded based on **teacher judgement of evidence of demonstrated attainment**, supported by local and national quality assurance processes.

SQA has produced subject-specific guidance for a range of qualifications (including NQs, NPA, NCs, Foundation Apprenticeships) taking into account disruption to learning this year that sets out the key evidence required for each course. National standards will be applied based on a holistic assessment of this key evidence of demonstrated attainment to determine provisional results. (Scottish Government 24 March 2021)

It is important that we communicate to families to make them aware how learners are going to be assessed in each subject area. This should include timings for assessments and weightings.

It is important that families understand that *inferred attainment* is not a part of the ACM for session 2020-21, and the differences between this year's model and the last. This includes being aware

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that once the assessment process has been concluded and evidence assessed, it is not possible to undertake additional assessments, reassessments, nor consider additional evidence, in support of a higher grade.

Teachers will provide effective feedback, at appropriate points, to ensure learners understand progress and next steps in learning.

Provisional grades cannot be shared until the quality assurance process has been concluded. In practice, this likely means sharing the grades during the final week of term, before submission to SQA. (Note however that this advice may have to be revisited once the SQA reveal final details of the appeals process for this session.)

Schools are best placed to respond to candidate absence on the day a particular piece of assessment is due to take place, as they would for any other internal assessment. All candidates should be afforded an opportunity to complete planned assessments in the same parameters and conditions as their peers to ensure there is demonstrated evidence of their ability.

### Use of SQA papers

National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher question papers and marking instructions are available on the SQA Secure website. Teachers can use them to support internal assessments when gathering evidence for provisional results in session 2020-21. The question papers can be used in full or in part.

The following link explains how to extract questions from these papers:

<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/95917.html>

There is however no requirement nor expectation that you reproduce an exam in full. **SQA guidance emphasises that there should be a clear focus on quality rather than quantity of the evidence.** It is perfectly acceptable to split an exam into two shorter assessments, and even then the combined length could be reduced by removing some questions if necessary. In such cases, care should be taken to ensure that the overall level of difficulty of any assessment is not reduced. Schools should also carefully consider the content of any assessments to ensure that they meet both SQA requirements and reflect the learning journey of those expected to sit them following periods of blended learning.

See SQA advice here for more details regarding evidence:

[https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/nq-estimates-guidance-2020-21.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/nq-estimates-guidance-2020-21.pdf)

All question papers and marking instructions must be stored securely and treated as confidential. The content must not be shared or discussed online - or in any location where they could be accessed by unauthorised persons.

We should bear in mind that learners currently in S4 and S5 have no experience whatsoever of sitting SQA examinations. Timetabling full length, exam-style assessments may not be the best way to allow these learners to perform to the best of their ability.

### Setting Grade Boundaries

We are aware that there appears to be contradictory advice from SQA for different subjects regarding the use of grade boundaries when generating provisional results and have contacted SQA as a matter of urgency to attempt to get clarification. This is an issue that has been raised nationally.

As all National Courses are internally assessed in 2021, centres have the flexibility to adjust their assessments or marking approaches to ensure they are consistent with national standards. If exceptionally they feel an assessment is more or less challenging than anticipated, they can take this into account when making the overall grading decisions for learners.

There is no expectation that a centre must change grade boundaries if an SQA paper is split in order to fit into a school timetable, unless it is felt this considerably changes the level of difficulty.

The SQA ask that equalities, children's rights and wellbeing considerations underpin all decisions and actions within the Alternative Certification Model.

### Exam/study leave

The advice remains as set out in earlier communications:

*As there are no exams in May/June, there will no longer be any Study Leave. Due to Covid-19 risk mitigations, schools may need to temporarily adjust the timetable to accommodate arrangements for assessments.*

(EL Guide for Learners & Parent/Carer January 2021)

*Due to Covid-19 risk mitigations, schools may need to temporarily adjust the timetable to accommodate arrangements for assessments.*

(EL Guidelines for SQA Qualifications November 2020)

Such adjustments to timetables may be required at times, for example, to allow sufficient space and capacity for key assessments to be delivered in line with SQA requirements for assessment conditions; to ensure effective delivery of Assessment Arrangements; or where there is a desire to ensure that every learner sitting a particular assessment can do so at the same time.

*Teachers should use the flexibility to assess learners at times and in ways that are appropriate to their needs to manage the assessment burden on young people during the remainder of the academic session (24 March 2021)*

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reducing-the-risks-in-schools/pages/school-operations/#curriculumandassessment>

### Invigilators

We are currently risk-assessing the use of invigilators (other than normal school staff) for assessments in the final term. We recognise that this would free up staff to focus on the marking of assessments, or further moderation activities. Note, however, that current restrictions on gatherings in an area are set at 50 individuals. Note also that any decision made now regarding the deployment of such staff, could be overtaken by subsequent Scottish Government in June, depending on infection rates etc.

## Moderation Guidelines

Moderation develops a shared understanding of standards and expectations. It is a collaborative activity, best done within or across a department or subject area where teachers are familiar with course specifications and approaches to assessment.

The main steps in any moderation exercise will involve all of the following:

1. checking assessment instruments before they are delivered, where possible, to ensure validity
2. arranging standardisation exercises, including reference to Understanding Standards, and cross marking an appropriate sample of scripts before bulk marking to set the standard
3. sampling assessment decisions – cross marking a sample of candidate responses (square root of total cohort) – and ensuring that appropriate action is taken before evidence is returned to candidates
4. signing off the completed ACM Quality Assurance Check-lists (Appendix 2)
5. maintaining assessment and moderation records using Education Scotland Digital Quality Assurance Tool, Local Authority or SEIC Moderation & Assessment paperwork.

## Appendix One – Quality Assurance Templates

### INSERT NAME High School National Qualifications 2021 Alternative Certification Model Quality Assurance Procedures

#### Internal Assessments

1. Colleagues involved in the delivery and assessment of the NQs have a knowledge and understanding of the national standards.
2. Colleagues are engaging with the most recent SQA Understanding Standards resources and activities as required.
3. Colleagues are working with the most up to date SQA course requirements for 2020-2021.
4. Colleagues are using the 2020-2021 SQA subject specific guidance on assessment.
5. An appropriate number of assessment opportunities are planned, in line with subject-specific guidance from the SQA, to generate the key assessment evidence.
6. Young people have been made aware of these assessments and are aware of how their grades will be calculated based on them.
7. Instruments of assessment are agreed in line with SQA subject specific guidance.
8. Marking instructions are standardised to conform to national standards and are applied consistently.
9. Grade boundaries applied are consistent with national standards.
10. Assessments are carried out in class and under SQA exam conditions.
11. Post assessment, learners' assessment evidence is sampled proportionately, and marking is cross-checked against the national standard. Candidate evidence at grade boundaries is included in the sample.

#### Provisional Grades

1. All teaching staff involved in the provisional grade process will work through the SQA Academy Estimates module found here:  
<https://www.sqaacademy.org.uk/course/view.php?idnumber=estimates>
2. Provisional grades are based on evidence of demonstrated attainment, have been derived in line with SQA guidance and with reference to the national standard.
3. Assessment judgements are moderated within departments/faculties to ensure that provisional grades are a fair representation of a candidate's ability and performance within the subject.
4. In the finalisation of the provisional results, consideration is given to inclusion, equality and the additional support needs of all candidates.
5. A provisional band is provided for all candidates, with the exception of those who have been withdrawn from the course.
6. Provisional results for the 2021 cohort are compared with the attainment data from previous cohorts on a subject by subject basis, with the exception of the 2020 data, using the supplied paperwork.
7. The Curriculum Leader and the DHT attainment/HT meet to review the provisional results compared to historical data. Implications are considered, and adjustments made as appropriate. Justification for any change is recorded.
8. CL and teacher agree and sign off the provisional results.
9. DHT attainment carries out a whole school analysis of provisional results, comparing 2021 provisional attainment with historical attainment patterns, year group potential and prior attainment if available.
10. DHT attainment/HT agree and sign off provisional grades.

## Internal Assessments QA Checklist

<b>Faculty</b>		
<b>Subject</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>CL initials</b>	
Colleagues involved in the delivery and assessment of the NQs have a knowledge and understanding of the national standards.		
Colleagues have engaged with the most recent SQA Understanding Standards resources and activities as required.		
Colleagues have worked with the most up to date SQA course requirements for 2020-2021.		
Colleagues have used the SQA subject specific guidance on assessment.		
An appropriate number of key assessment pieces have been used to generate the provisional grades, in line with the SQA subject-specific guidance.		
Appropriate weight given to each individual piece of evidence in accordance with its predictive value		
Young people have been made aware of these assessments and how they will be used to generate grades.		
Standardised marking instructions, compliant with national standards, have been applied consistently.		
Grade boundaries applied are consistent with national standards.		
The appropriate SQA assessment conditions have been applied.		
Moderation exercises have been carried out internally and externally, including reference to Understanding Standards, cross marking an appropriate sample of scripts before bulk marking to set the standard.		
<b>Teacher signature(s)</b> <i>Please indicate which levels you are presenting for, eg Nat5/H etc.</i>		<b>Date</b>
<b>CL signature</b>		<b>Date</b>

## Provisional Results QA Checklist

<b>Faculty</b>		
<b>Subject</b>		
<b>Activity</b>		<b>CL /SLT initials</b>
All faculty colleagues involved in the provisional grade process have worked through the SQA Academy Estimates module.		
All curriculum leaders involved in the provisional grade process have attended a Local Authority briefing on Assessment & Moderation Guidelines		
Provisional grades are based on evidence of demonstrated attainment, have been derived in line with SQA guidance and with reference to the national standard.		
Assessment judgements have been moderated internally and externally to ensure that provisional grades are a fair representation of a candidate's ability and performance within the subject.		
In the finalisation of the provisional results, consideration has been given to inclusion, equality and the additional support needs of all candidates.		
A provisional band has been provided for all candidates, with the exception of those who have been withdrawn from the course, by 18 June.		
Provisional results for the 2021 cohort have been compared with the attainment data from previous cohorts, with the exception of the 2020 data.		
Outcomes of the data analysis have been discussed with Faculty Link DHT/HT. Implications have been considered, and adjustments made as appropriate. Justification for any adjustments has been recorded.		
SLT has carried out a whole school analysis of provisional results, comparing 2021 provisional attainment with historical attainment patterns, year group potential and prior attainment if available.		
<b>CL signature</b>		<b>Date</b>
<b>SLT signature</b>		<b>Date</b>

**Local Authority Quality Assurance checklist**

QIEO will engage with HT/DHT regarding Assessment Strategy and Quality Assurance processes - March/April 2021.		
Guidance on the Alternative Certification Model will be issued.		
Professional Learning on the Assessment and Moderation Guidance will be offered to all faculty leaders/curriculum leaders in April/May 2021.		
Requests for external support with validation and moderation from departments through the Lead Teacher Network will be facilitated.		
Collaboration and collegiate activities across senior and middle leaders and within subject groups to validate assessment instruments and moderate assessment samples will be facilitated.		
Data pack on previous patterns of attainment to compare previous trends on performance for individual subjects and cumulative whole school attainment trends will be provided.		
QIEO will engage with HT/DHT to discuss the submitted provisional results and confirm that the Alternative Certification Model Quality Assurance Procedures have been applied, including Internal Assessment & Provisional Results QA Checklists– May/June 2021		
<b>QIEO Signature</b>		<b>Date</b>
<b>HT Signature</b>		<b>Date</b>

## Appendix Two Part (a) – calendar of moderation support

Local Authority Subject Moderation March-May 2021	Planned	When is this taking place?	Authority contact for curricular area/Lead Teacher
<b>Expressive Arts</b>			QIEO contact Alison Humphreys
Music	Yes	Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> May  Moderation partnerships established and Teams channels set up	Mairi McLennan (Boroughmuir)  Aimee Brown (Craigroyston)
Dance	Yes	Friday 26 <sup>th</sup> March – preparation for moderation sessions  N5 1:15-2pm  H 2-2:45pm  Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> May	Kirsty Clarke (Tynecastle)
Drama	Yes	Friday 26 <sup>th</sup> March  Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> May	Suzie Lundy (The Royal High)  Scott Ballantyne (Holy Rood)
Art and Design/ Photography	Yes	Friday 26 <sup>th</sup> March  Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> May	Robyn Wade (Holy Rood)  Nicola Brophy (Balerno)
PE	Yes	N5 and AH PE Understanding Standards Friday 26 <sup>th</sup> March  H PE Understanding Standards tbc post-Easter  N5/H/AH Moderation Events will take place on Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> May  Schools paired up to moderate evidence	Contact Mel Coutts/Michelle Moore in the first instance   Stuart Clark (WHEC)
<b>Technologies</b>			QIEO contact Dave McKee  Alan Whyte (Lead Practitioner – Firrhill)
Business	Yes	Higher Admin Tuesday 20 April  Nat 5 Admin Wednesday 21 April	Heather Lovatt (St. Augustine's)

		<p>Higher BM Tuesday 27 April</p> <p>Nat 5 BM Wednesday 28 April</p> <p>Nat 5 Thursday Accounts 29 April</p> <p>Higher Monday Accounts 26 April</p> <p>Nat 5 Economics Thursday 29 April</p> <p>Higher Economics Monday 26 April</p>	
CDT	Yes	<p>Friday March 26th: Moderation Plan Launch and outline of the group</p> <p>Week beginning 19th April: meeting of CDT subject/level facilitators.</p> <p>Subject meetings for the following will then be arranged by subject facilitators:</p> <p>N5 Design and Manufacture</p> <p>Higher and Advanced Higher Design and Manufacture</p> <p>N5 Graphic Communication</p> <p>Higher and Advanced Higher Graphic Communication</p> <p>N5 Engineering Science</p> <p>Higher and Advanced Higher Engineering Science</p> <p>N5 Practical Woodwork</p>	<p>Scott Harris (Holy Rood)</p> <p>Lynsey McNamee (Holy Rood)</p>

		<p>N5 Practical Metalwork</p> <p>These will be different days and times. We are using Onenote to collect evidence and Microsoft forms to collect evidence. We have planned to group schools into 3 so that everyone can be involved.</p>	
Computing	TBC		<p>Kris Reid (Firrhill)</p> <p>Lauren Stalker (St. Thomas of Aquin's)</p>
Health and Food Technology	Yes	<p>4 subjects:</p> <p>Health and Food Technology Nat 5/H</p> <p>Fashion and Textile Technology Nat 5/H</p> <p>Practical Cookery Nat 5</p> <p>Practical Cake Craft Nat 5</p> <p>We are setting up moderation groups on Teams.</p> <p>Next network meeting to decide next steps is 27th April.</p> <p>Moderation events:</p> <p>14th May, 25th May and 9<sup>th</sup> June.</p>	<p>QIEO contact Janice Watson</p> <p>Susan Imlach (Holy Rood)</p> <p>Laura Fry (Castlebrae)</p>
<b>Social Subjects</b>			QIEO Rosie McColl
RME	TBC	<p>SEIC event on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2021</p> <p>Moderation partnerships being established</p>	Carrie Thomson (Liberton)
History	Yes	<p>Friday 26<sup>th</sup> March</p> <p>Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May</p> <p>Summer term Subject Network meeting date tbc</p>	<p>Ashleigh Kennedy (James Gillespie's)</p> <p>From Easter: Lindsay Rea (Trinity Academy) and Gavin Cameron (Firrhill)</p>

Geography	TBC		Hannah McGowan (St. Thomas of Aquin's)
Modern Studies	Yes	AH Thursday 18 <sup>th</sup> March N5 Monday 26 <sup>th</sup> April Framing Additional Qs Workshop 26 <sup>th</sup> April Marking Best Practice AH Thursday 6 <sup>th</sup> May Pre-assessment Moderation Friday 4 <sup>th</sup> June 1-3pm tbc Post-assessment Moderation tbc	Laura Halliday (James Gillespie's)  (Laura Halliday leading AH moderation, Robert Gray leading H moderation, Katrina Smith leading N5 moderation)
Philosophy/Psychology		Cross-authority network is well-established N5/H Psychology Wednesday 10 <sup>th</sup> March End April/May date tbc Higher Philosophy Post-Easter date tbc	John Cudlipp (Broughton)
<b>Literacy/Languages</b>			
English	TBC		QIEO contact Michelle Moore  Nicola Daniel (Broughton)
Modern Languages	Yes	<u>Speaking and Writing</u> 18 <sup>th</sup> March (AH) 23 <sup>rd</sup> March (H) 25 <sup>th</sup> March (N5)  (NB: March events had 50 attendees from across almost all schools)  <u>Reading and Listening</u> May dates tbc	QIEO contact Bethan Owen  Pam Tosh (Broughton)
Media	TBC	Cross-authority network is well-established.	QIEO contact Michelle Moore

			Kirsty Mackinnon (Liberton)
<b>Maths/Sciences</b>			QIM contact Darren McKinnon
Maths	Yes	Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> May Tuesday 25 <sup>th</sup> May Moderation partnerships established and times agreed between them	Dave McKay (Tynecastle) Jennifer Skene (Liberton)
Biology	Yes	Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> May Moderation partnerships established for those who expressed interest and work is underway – times agreed by partners	Deeonne Clark (St. Augustine's)
Chemistry	Yes	Friday 26 <sup>th</sup> March Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> May Further additional date tbc if required	Matt Wilson (St. Thomas of Aquin's) Claire Ritchie (Leith Academy)
Physics	TBC		David Owens (Craigmount) Murat Gullen (Craigmount)

## Appendix Two Part (b) – Lead Teacher Guidance (updated Feb 2021)

### SQA Moderation and Quality Assurance 20-21

SQA guidance entitled “National Courses: guidance on gathering evidence and producing estimates” (October 2020) can be found here: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/95281.html>.

Subject specific guidance for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher can be found here: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/95258.html>

SQA have made question papers available through the SQA Secure website.

New materials and webinars are being posted on the Understanding Standards website: <https://www.understandingstandards.org.uk/>

The revised model for delivering National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher results in 2021 (also known as the Alternative Certification Model) was published on 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2021: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/95257.html>

Within the model, the revised date for provisional results is now **25<sup>th</sup> June, 2021**.

The revised alternative certification model is based on five key stages:

**Stage 1:** ongoing until April 2021 – Teachers and lecturers access subject specific guidance, assessment resources and Understanding Standards materials and webinars from SQA.

**Stage 2:** April to May 2021 – School, college, training provider and local authority quality assurance continues. During May, SQA requests, reviews and provides feedback on assessment evidence from each school, college and training provider.

**Stage 3:** end May to 25 June 2021 – Schools, colleges, training providers, local authorities and SQA work through final stages of local and national quality assurance and feedback, to reach provisional results that are consistent, equitable and fair.

**Stage 4:** by 25 June 2021 – Schools, colleges and training providers submit quality assured provisional results to SQA.

**Stage 5:** Appeals process for 2020–21 – To be advised following consultation.

The SQA Academy course which all staff can access can be found here:

<https://www.sqaacademy.org.uk/course/view.php?idnumber=estimateqa>

### Current Expectations

In CEC, Lead Teachers and their corresponding networks offer a key mechanism to ensure work on moderation continues in line with previous good practice. In particular, we know the support that subject networks provide to smaller departments or single teachers of subjects within departments is invaluable.

We are aware moderation is underway, including within departments and through existing partnership working across presenting centres, and a number of moderation opportunities took place on the Framework Friday on 15<sup>th</sup> January.

There continues to be an expectation for moderation and quality assurance within the national guidance, although SQA acknowledge that assessment may now take place later in the year. Engaging in school and local authority quality assurance activities is first mentioned in Stage 1 and is mentioned again in Stage 2 guidelines. We are in a strong position with this.

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Within Stage 2, SQA give some indication of external quality assurance:

*“During May, on a proportionate basis, SQA selects courses from each school and college for national quality assurance and provides subject-specific feedback. For national quality assurance, this package of evidence will be less than that used for reaching provisional results. The assessment evidence can be partial or incomplete. For example, it could consist of one or two pieces of key evidence from a small number of learners in the subjects selected. For some practical subjects, where capturing and submitting assessment evidence is not possible, sampling activity will be replaced by a professional discussion held between the school, college or training provider and a SQA senior appointee.”*

**The First Minister indicated in a recent parliamentary address that 2 Assessment Support Days will be forthcoming. No further details have been given to date.**

### Next Steps:

To provide further opportunities to work collaboratively, we would ask you to consider the following:

- **Friday 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2021** has been agreed as an optional/voluntary CEC subject network afternoon. Please consider using this time to create an opportunity for subject specialists to work together on aspects of moderation. In order to support consistency of assessment judgement within your subject area, this may be a good time to use Understanding Standards resources as the SQA guidance above suggests.
- In addition to this, the **Framework Friday on 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2021** will provide a final opportunity. At this stage, it may be possible for moderation of pupil assessment evidence to take place.
- Subject Network meetings will continue to run remotely, consider when these will be best placed to meet the needs of your network.
- As Lead Teacher, prioritise offers of support to smaller departments or single subject teachers within departments, if you are able to. Encourage smaller departments to buddy up with moderation partners to build their capacity.
- All the above are optional professional learning opportunities and you are best placed to understand what will work best for your own subject and network.

### Suggested Quality Assurance and Subject Support Activity February – June 2021

- Following the phased return to school, schools will develop their own QA calendars/moderation guidance to meet the needs of their context and revised assessment opportunities/windows. **NB:** We recognise that questions remain unanswered as to the possibility of a full return to school for our learners and that some SQA subject guidance appears predicated on this assumption.
- Effective formative feedback should continue to be provided to learners during the continuation of learning and teaching, both remotely and during practical activities in school, while working towards course completion.
- Learning and teaching in subjects with highest levels of critical practical work that require in-school facilities and cannot be undertaken remotely is a key priority within the Scottish Government return to school guidance - <https://education.gov.scot/media/ry4bk2eg/returnofseniorphaselearners.pdf>
- This guidance also asks that learners have secure foundation and course coverage prior to formal assessment taking place in the later stages of the 2020/21 academic session
- Subjects updates continue to be released – please check this link: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/96037.html>
- CEC and SEIC Subject Networks will continue to meet – please contact [Michelle.Moore2@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:Michelle.Moore2@edinburgh.gov.uk) if you have any questions about the SEIC networks.
- Link with your subject QIEO for advice and support as appropriate.

- As assessment evidence is built up, moderation activity will allow practitioners and curriculum leaders to review and check the evidence used to make final provisional results decisions.
- The local authority will make a pro-forma available for Senior Leaders to confirm SQA and local guidance has been followed throughout the estimates process. This was done last year and was felt to be supportive.

### Suggested Moderation Activity on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2021

#### 1:30-3:30pm

It may be more appropriate for a subject's moderation activity in March to focus on consistent application of national standards– this could be done in a locality meeting as opposed to a 1:1 moderation partnership. Discussion on the key features and criteria of each “grade” could be part of this approach.

CLs/Subject Leaders from the locality could use resources from the SQA Understanding Standards website to support this: <https://www.understandingstandards.org.uk/>

There may be an opportunity for staff with SQA appointee/verification/marking experience within each subject area to add value to this process or to lead discussion.

It is recognised that any moderation activity at this stage will be supportive, rather than “review and check”. Further opportunities for departmental moderation in line with school quality assurance procedures will be required prior to estimate finalisation.

### Suggested Moderation Activity on 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2021

#### 1:30-3:30pm

Sampling of pupil work **if ready to do so** – with a focus on an appropriate number of candidates on the borderline between grades

Different moderation teams may wish to focus on different levels – National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher.

If using the same assessment instrument (part of an SQA paper from the secure website, for example), you may wish to agree on certain questions that you focus discussion on in order to maximise the time available to dialogue 3 pupils to discuss per “moderation partner” across a range of standards is suggested but it is recognised this may vary across subjects.

Where possible, this sample could be shared in advance between moderation partners and then discussed during an agreed 1:1 Teams meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> May (or another agreed date as appropriate).

The SQA provide guidance on unconscious bias – samples for discussion can be anonymised, for example, to increase robustness of the agreed judgement of standard – thus: *“Use of blind or cross marking can decrease the potential for bias in grading decisions, and moderation across departments, learning areas and faculties will ensure fairness for all candidates and that robust standards are maintained.”* (From National Courses: guidance on gathering evidence and producing estimates p3).

Single subject teachers within departments should, where possible, retain the moderation partnerships that are currently in place or that emerge as a positive consequence of January's Framework Friday moderation opportunity. There is no requirement for all candidate evidence to be cross-marked. A proportionate, sampling approach will work well.

**SQA Guidance on Key Roles and Responsibilities**

<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/96762.html>

This link takes you to more detailed guidance on the responsibilities of teachers, schools and local authorities regarding SQA Quality Assurance for the National Qualifications 2021.

**Education Scotland's support for Digital Quality Assurance of National Qualifications**

Using Microsoft Teams and OneNote, learner evidence can be curated and shared with peers. Discussion around learner evidence can be done asynchronously or live, with the results of the discussion recorded in text, video or voice notes. Every member of the team will be able to access the record of quality assurance to enable them to make judgements about their own learners. You can find out more about this process here:

<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/digilearn/2021/02/19/digital-quality-assurance-of-national-qualifications/>

## Appendix Three– Curricular and Subject Leader Guidance (March 2021)

The SQA published broad guidance entitled “National Courses: guidance on gathering evidence and producing estimates” in October 2020 – see link: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/95281.html>

From P9 of this guidance:

*Moderation across departments, learning areas and faculties will ensure fairness for all candidates and ensure that robust standards are maintained. **It is good practice to extend moderation activity beyond the centre to a local or regional level, where possible.***

Updated materials and webinars to support moderation are being posted on the Understanding Standards website: <https://www.understandingstandards.org.uk/>

This link takes you to more detailed guidance on the responsibilities of teachers, schools and local authorities regarding SQA Quality Assurance for the National Qualifications 2021: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/96762.html>

We are aware moderation is underway in many subject areas already, both within departments and through existing partnership working across presenting centres – **thank you.**

Your subject Lead Teachers will communicate with you, through your Subject Networks, when any further planned moderation activities are going to take place. Some subject moderation will take place on agreed Framework afternoons; some subjects will have their own agreed times and dates as best suits the needs of their subject area.

At present, moderation across centres will take place remotely using Teams. It is hoped that we may be able to permit some face-to-face subject meetings in May, but this is not yet confirmed.

Each curricular area has a QIEO contact link and a Lead Teacher. Please contact your Lead Teacher in the first instance, should you have any questions about moderation opportunities.

### **Suggested moderation activity - April – May 2021**

Use moderation partnerships to support the verification of adapted SQA papers or other instruments of assessment to ensure they continue to meet national standards so that they remain valid assessments.

Use Subject network meetings to engage in professional dialogue regarding how learners within a subject will be assessed to achieve consistency of opportunity across the authority for pupils to demonstrate their ability and generate assessment evidence.

There is a **Framework Friday on 14<sup>th</sup> May** – Lead Teachers have been asked to use this afternoon to support the sampling, cross-marking (in a proportionate model) and moderation of learner evidence. This will be a further opportunity to work with colleagues from other centres. Please do make use of this opportunity wherever possible.

If using the same assessment instrument (part of an SQA paper from the secure website, for example), you may wish to agree on certain questions that you focus discussion on in order to maximise the time available to dialogue.

The SQA provide guidance on unconscious bias – samples for discussion can be anonymised, for example, to increase robustness of the agreed judgement of standard – thus: *“Use of blind or cross marking can decrease the potential for bias in grading decisions, and moderation across departments, learning areas and faculties will ensure fairness for all candidates and that robust standards are maintained.”* (From National Courses: guidance on gathering evidence and producing estimates p3)

Single subject teachers within departments should, where possible, retain the moderation partnerships that are currently in place as a positive consequence of the earlier Framework Friday moderation opportunities in January and March (or similar as your Lead Teacher arranged).

CEC Assessment Support Days are on **Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> May and Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2021.**

### **Use of SQA papers**

National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher question papers and marking instructions are available on the SQA Secure website. Teachers can use them to support internal assessments when gathering evidence for provisional results in session 2020-21. The question papers can be used in full or in part. The following link explains how to extract questions from these papers:

<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/95917.html>

### **Setting Grade Boundaries**

We are aware that there appears to be contradictory advice from SQA for different subjects regarding the use of grade boundaries when generating provisional results and have contacted SQA as a matter of urgency to attempt to get clarification. This is an issue that has been raised nationally.

As all National Courses are internally assessed in 2021, centres have the flexibility to adjust their assessments or marking approaches to ensure they are consistent with national standards. If exceptionally they feel an assessment is more or less challenging than anticipated, they can take this into account when making the overall grading decisions for learners.

There is no expectation that a centre must change grade boundaries if an SQA paper is split in order to fit into a school timetable, unless it is felt this considerably changes the level of difficulty.

The SQA ask that equalities, children’s rights and wellbeing considerations underpin all decisions and actions within the Alternative Certification Model.

### **Education Scotland’s support for Digital Quality Assurance of National Qualifications**

Using Microsoft Teams and OneNote, learner evidence can be curated and shared with peers. Discussion around learner evidence can be done asynchronously or live, with the results of the discussion recorded in text, video or voice notes. Every member of the team will be able to access the record of quality assurance to enable them to make judgements about their own learners. You can find out more about this process here:

<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/digilearn/2021/02/19/digital-quality-assurance-of-national-qualifications/>

# Appendix Four– SQA Qualifications guide for Learners, Parents & Carers (updated March 2021)

## Introduction

We understand that you may have a range of questions relating to the changes in SQA exam arrangements this year. This guide provides answers to the most common questions we have been asked. It is dynamic and will be revised to reflect ongoing updates from SQA.

**We would encourage our learners to contact their Pupil Support Leader at school if they are feeling unsure or even anxious about the new assessment arrangements as help is available.**

## Key Messages

- The Scottish Government has decided that **National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams will not go ahead this school session 2020-21**. This is due to ongoing concerns about the impact of Covid-19 and the need to ensure that there is fairness and equity for all of Scotland's young people.
- The **Alternative Certification Model (ACM) for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher** will follow a similar process. This means that the teacher or lecturer will decide each learner's provisional result by judging the assessment evidence gathered and checking the results with other staff in your school or college. This also means that coursework will not be marked by SQA, however it can still count towards evidence of your learning.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What does the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) mean for me as a learner?

- This year teachers and lecturers will use the assessments you have done as evidence to decide what your results should be. This is referred to as using demonstrated attainment. This will be supported by a robust set of checks (quality assurance) carried out by the child's school (or college), The City of Edinburgh Council and SQA. The results will be finalised following various layers of quality assurance, including sampling by SQA senior subject specialists.
- The ACM aims to ensure fair and credible results for all learners undertaking National Qualifications.

### How will I know how I am doing throughout the session?

- Teachers will provide effective feedback, at appropriate points, to ensure you understand your progress and next steps in learning.

### How will teachers gather assessment evidence when pupils are in school?

- Schools are aiming to **assess your learning at key points** using appropriate assessment conditions.
- These 'key points' may be **coordinated across the school using an assessment calendar**. Various terms such as 'assessment window' or 'prelim' may be used to describe these formal assessments. Due to Covid-19 risk mitigations, schools may need to temporarily adjust the timetable to accommodate arrangements for assessments.
- This year teachers will use the assessments you have done as evidence to decide what your results should be. This is referred to as using demonstrated attainment. The school will make you aware of:
  - the assessments that will be used as evidence of demonstrated attainment
  - when the assessments will take place
  - the provisional result based on evidence of demonstrated attainment will be shared with young people once the Quality Assurance process is complete.
- The SQA has published subject-specific guidance to advise teachers and lecturers on the types of evidence that can be used to determine a provisional result. This can be found [here](#).

### What type of assessment evidence will be gathered?

- SQA has reduced the evidence requirements for each National Course to the minimum necessary to preserve the validity and public confidence in the qualifications.
- SQA has also published subject-specific guidance documents across National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses.
  - These documents summarise the key pieces of evidence required as the basis for provisional results.

### Why is quality assurance necessary?

- Quality assurance is about fairness for you. A robust system of checks (quality assurance) is being put in place to make sure that a National 5/Higher/Advanced Higher awarded in the north of Scotland is of the same standard as one which is awarded in the south of Scotland and everywhere in between.

### How will the quality assurance model work in session 2020-21?

- Each school will use SQA guidance and assessment materials to help gather your evidence. This includes ensuring in advance that the **assessments used are valid, reliable, practicable and fair**. Your school and local authority will check your assessment evidence.
- This evidence will be quality assured through a robust process at subject, whole school, local authority and national level.
- SQA will request, review and give feedback on samples of assessment evidence from your school and/or college.
- Sampling ensures that all teachers/lecturers are making consistent and reliable assessment judgements against the national standard. This includes checking that assessment judgements are free from bias and that learners are treated fairly and equitably.

- Your school and local authority will look at SQA feedback and check your provisional results. The deadline by which all gathering of evidence should be completed is 11<sup>th</sup> June. This is so that there is sufficient time to do this checking of results.
- Local Authority & School Quality assurance will take place from 14<sup>th</sup> June.
- Once the assessment process has been concluded and evidence assessed, it is not possible to undertake additional assessments, reassessments, nor consider additional evidence.
- Your school and/or college will **send your provisional results to SQA by 25th June 2021.**
- On **16 Feb 2021**, the Scottish Government announced that there will be two exceptional in-service days in all secondary schools across Scotland to provide extra time for teachers to engage with the Alternative Certification Model (ACM). **In Edinburgh, these will be 25<sup>th</sup> May and 9<sup>th</sup> June.**

#### **How will I be supported if I have an Additional Support Need? Can I still access Assessment Arrangements (AA)?**

- If you have an additional support need and have been identified as needing assessment arrangements (AA), these should, where possible, be in place for each assessment. Please speak to your subject teacher or Support for Learning Leader if you have any concerns about the AA process.
- Assistive features are built into iPad to complement vision, hearing, motor skills, learning and literacy. To look at Accessibility features on iPad, go to Settings > Accessibility
- <https://www.apple.com/uk/accessibility/>
- The Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Service have created a YouTube channel with videos on accessibility features: [Additional Support for Learning Service Edinburgh – YouTube](#).

#### **Due to the loss of 'in-school' learning time, caused by lockdowns, and the absences of some pupils and staff having to self-isolate, will this affect how well I do this year?**

- It's important to remember that learners across Scotland are in a similar situation, so the SQA, local authority and school are working hard to ensure you are not disadvantaged.
- SQA have made changes to N5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses to take account of this.
- Ensure that you are engaged in your learning now and maintain this, as much as possible, throughout the session. If you have any concerns, please speak to your teacher or Pupil Support Leader.
- Your school will have procedures in place to support anyone who is absent during the year.

#### **Will there be Study Leave and when will the Timetable changes happen?**

- As there are no exams in May/June, there will no longer be any Study Leave. Due to Covid-19 risk mitigations, schools may need to temporarily adjust the timetable to allow sufficient space and capacity for key assessments to be delivered in line with SQA requirements for assessment conditions.

- We are working with schools across the City to develop plans for learning in the summer term once the gathering of evidence for SQA has been completed. The school will confirm these arrangements once agreed.
- There will be no new timetable for the current Senior Phase prior to Mon 14 June.

#### **When will I receive my results?**

- Learners will receive their SQA results on **10 August 2021**.

#### **What is the appeals process?**

- During March, SQA is asking a range of individuals and groups including learners, parents/carers, teachers and national organisations to share their views on appeals. This will help to develop the appeals process for 2021. More information about this can be found at <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/96506.html>

#### **How can I find out further information about the Alternative Certification Model?**

- To stay up to date on 2021 National Qualifications visit [www.sqa.org.uk/NQ2021](http://www.sqa.org.uk/NQ2021)
- The SQA have also produced a booklet with information on the Alternative Certification Model for learners and parents. This can be found at [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/NQ-2021-what-you-need-to-know.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/NQ-2021-what-you-need-to-know.pdf)
- SQA Learner & Parent information can be found at <https://blogs.sqa.org.uk/2021/>

## Appendix Five – ACM & AA Presentation to SfLL

13 January 2021

### ACM & Assessment Arrangements

13 January 2021

Welcome -  
happy new  
year!

#### Agenda

- Assessment Contingency Model (N5, Higher & Advanced Higher) and implications for AA
- SQA NQ2021 Update 120121
- Challenges: resourcing AA (staffing, accommodation, digital); Health & Safety
- Solutions: Digital; Professional Learning – Apps and accessibility features already in use; how remote assessments currently delivered
- Q&A with SQA representative – opportunity to seek clarification from SQA on AA

## Assessment Contingency Model (N5, Higher & Advanced Higher) and implications for AA

- SQA NQ2021 Update 120121
- What about Assessment Arrangements?
- Teachers are using a variety of internal assessments to gather evidence of attainment. Students with disabilities or additional support needs who require support should be provided with suitable Assessment Arrangements<sup>[8]</sup>
- SQA advise that centres should "continue to use the same assessment arrangements processes already in place in your centre to support candidates requiring an assessment arrangement for an internal assessment"<sup>[9]</sup>
- Note that "Centres do not need to submit assessment arrangement requests to SQA for National Qualifications in 2020-21".

## Challenges: resourcing AA (staffing, accommodation, digital); Health & Safety

- FAQs document to follow based on questions submitted

## Solutions:

ASL Service staff can deliver training to school staff so they can upskill in this area and in turn, upskill pupils:

- Accessibility features of Microsoft Office tools e.g. immersive reader. Please note interest for this in the chat. Please note other tools/ areas you need specific input for.
- Accessibility features of iPads – focus for the February SFL Business Meeting on 19.2.21. We can open this up to wider staff – contact Fran Platt (ASLS DHT).

Remote assessments – still relevant for pupils who we predict will not return to their school when they reopen. CEC will produce guidance on this.

Support for Parents:

- ASLS youtube channel with videos on accessibility features: [Additional Support for Learning Service Edinburgh – YouTube](#). There are videos up currently and ICT ASL are looking to add further examples in the coming weeks.

## Solutions: iPad – Accessibility Features

"Powerful assistive features are built into iPad to complement your vision, hearing, motor skills, learning and literacy. So you can create, learn, work, play and do pretty much anything you want to do, wherever you want to do it, more easily than ever".

To look at Accessibility features on your iPad, go to **Settings > Accessibility**

<https://www.apple.com/uk/accessibility/>

• Get Started with all Accessibility features:

<https://support.apple.com/en-gb/guide/ipad/ipad9a2465f9/ipados>

- [Dictation](#)
- [Spoken Content](#)
- [Look Up a word's definition](#)
- [Safari Reader View](#)
- [Colour tint \(overlay\)](#)
- [Magnifier](#)
- [Guided Access](#)



## Solutions:

- **Gracemount High School:**  
[http://www.gracemounthighschool.co.uk/Learning\\_At\\_Home/index.html](http://www.gracemounthighschool.co.uk/Learning_At_Home/index.html)
- <http://www.gracemounthighschool.co.uk/resources/School-Documents/Learning-At-Home/EAL-Secondary-App-Wheel.pdf>
- **Call Scotland:**
- <https://www.callscotland.org.uk/blog/technology-based-assessment-arrangements-during-lockdown-at-home/>
- **Digital Support (Edinburgh Learns @ Home on SharePoint)**
- The **Digital Support** information in the **Edinburgh Learns at Home** site has been reorganised and updated. You can get direct access to it from this link: <http://tinyurl.com/CECDigital>.

## SQA – role in AA

- NO AA requests will be submitted to SQA for 20/21
- Role of SQA is now different as no longer 'reporting' to it
- BUT maintain own Audit Record of all school AA decisions (SfLL & Link SLT, Ed Psych advise on complex cases)
- Follow your existing school AA policy and procedure
- SQA still able to advise:
  - Contact <[aarequests@sqa.org.uk](mailto:aarequests@sqa.org.uk)> with any specific pupil/subject queries
  - Contact <[Susan.Gibb@sqa.org.uk](mailto:Susan.Gibb@sqa.org.uk)> with any policy/procedure questions

- Use existing SQA guidance documents – based on legislative framework:
- (2019) [Assessment Arrangements Explained: Information for centres](#)  
 SQA (2020) [About assessment arrangements: Assessment Arrangements for 2020-21](#).  
 SQA (2020) [Using technology to support assessment remotely: questions and answers](#).  
 SQA (2020) [Advice for centres in using technology to support assessment remotely](#).

SQA Resources

- ? AA FAQs to follow
- 🔑 Await further advice on 'universal' remote assessments – no 'whole cohort' assessments at this stage
- 📄 CEC will produce Guidelines on Remote Assessment if necessary to ensure consistency across schools
- 📋 School to audit AA and maintain Record
- ☎️ Contact Anna Kellner for PL

Next Steps

Acknowledgments

- Susan Gibb – SQA
- Jude Durnan - ASL
- Fran Platt - ASL
- Anna Kellner - ASL
- Annemarie Proctor – Educational Psychologist
- AA Working Group: Roberta Porter, Mike Irving, Alison Fotheringham, Rob Greenaway, Sally MacMillan, Moira Wilson

## Appendix Six– SQA Qualification Guidelines 2020-21

### November 2020 (note: now out of date, for reference only)

#### Introduction

This document has been created as a result of the guidelines that have been published recently by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) in relation to National Qualifications and other SCQF Awards. It is dynamic and will be revised to reflect the ongoing updates from SQA.

SQA Guidelines so far:

- [SQA support by qualification type](#)
- Adaptations to [Internally-assessed qualifications](#) (**National Progression Awards**, National Certificates, **Skills for Work**, Awards and internally-assessed NQ Unit) with subject-specific guidance
- Information to support delivery of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher course assessments [National Qualifications 2020/21](#)
- There will be **NO** external assessment of **National 5** courses this year – either by an exam or by coursework.
- SQA Exam diet for Higher & Advanced Higher pupils will begin on Monday 10th May and run to Friday 4th June 2021 - [a final decision on whether this exam diet takes place will be made by the February holidays](#). SQA [exam timetable for 2020/21](#).
- SQA published [broad guidance on evidence gathering and estimation](#) with a very clear focus on the quality, not quantity, of evidence.
- This is accompanied by an [SQA Academy Course](#) for teaching staff on quality assuring estimates.
- Evidence-based estimates will be used in three ways during 2021:
  - **National 5 qualifications will be awarded on basis of centre estimates**, supported by assessment resources and quality assurance. Subject-specific guidance is available on the [NQ subject pages](#).
  - **Higher and Advanced Higher exam diet** will run, and estimates submitted as part of the normal awarding processes.
  - If the public health situation deteriorates and exams at Higher and Advanced Higher are cancelled, **then estimates will be used with appropriate quality assurance to award qualifications at Higher and Advanced Higher levels**, as well as at National 5. The Scottish Government have identified February 2021 as the cut-off date for any change to the current arrangements.

#### Looking outwards

The City of Edinburgh work closely with SQA regional advisers and school SQA Coordinators to provide support in relation to National and internally-assessed qualifications. A few workstreams, with staff and stakeholders from across the school estate, have been created to lead on arrangements for:

- Evidence gathering, estimates and moderation
- Subject-specific support
- Alternative Assessment Arrangements
- Information and advice for learners, parents and carers

#### Gathering evidence and producing estimates

Based on SQA and local guidelines, each school can determine the most equitable and efficient means of gathering evidence and producing estimates.

#### National 5

- Alongside subject-specific guidance on the [NQ subject pages](#) SQA is publishing assessment resources:
  - SQA devised National 5 question papers and marking instructions posted on SQA's secure website.
  - Understanding Standards materials to reinforce practitioners' understanding of the national standard, including guidance on making grading decisions.

- Focus is on gathering **key pieces of evidence that have a high predictive value aligned to the required assessment components**.
- About **quality of evidence** (two to four pieces depending on subject requirements) rather than quantity, managing assessment load for learners and workload for staff.
- Opportunity for **more flexible classroom-based assessment**.
- As there is no National 5 exam, there is no expectation that schools hold a formal diet of prelims. The use of the term “prelim” with regard to National 5 has the potential to be misleading and we would suggest using the phrase **formal assessment**.
- Aiming to **assess candidates at key points in their learning** using appropriate assessment conditions. These key points may be **coordinated across the school in an assessment ‘window’ or ‘block’**.
- **Timelines** for these assessment windows or blocks should be **shared in advance** with learners and parents/carers.
- Due to Covid-19 mitigations, schools may need to temporarily adjust the timetable to accommodate arrangements for assessments.
- For the purposes of estimation, candidate evidence **should be gathered at the later stages of learning**. No one should lose out because of a poor performance in an assessment early in the session.
- **Assessment resources can be adapted by schools**, such as splitting a question paper component, to **fit delivery within class periods**.
- **Effective feedback** should be provided following each ‘assessment window’ to ensure each learner understands their progress, level of attainment and next steps for learning. Care should be taken with the use of terms such as “target grade” later in the session lest this be misunderstood as a predicted grade.
- Where **candidates are unable to come into the school**, assessments can be conducted remotely, provided appropriate authentication measures are in place, which for some assessments will require online supervision. SQA to issue more guidance shortly.
- [Assessment Arrangements 2020-21](#) **If candidates are have additional support needs and have been identified as needing assessment arrangements, please ensure that these are in place for each assessment and/or assignment**. Where possible, follow your normal internal verification process for requesting assessment arrangements.  
The AAR system will not accept requests for National 5 candidates this year, so keep a record of your decisions and any evidence that supports them.
- **Quality assure estimates** using the [SQA Academy Course](#) for teaching staff. A candidate’s final estimate must be realistic and based on the evidence you possess of demonstrated attainment.
- **Procedural information on submitting estimates** to SQA will be published in *Delivering National Qualifications: Guide for SQA Co-ordinators 2020–21*.
- **Robust moderation** of evidence gathering should be based on collaborative approaches to marking, at faculty level, and ideally on a wider scale. Marking should be cross-checked against national standards as exemplified in SQA Understanding Standards materials. There will be an opportunity to conduct cross-centre moderation and sharing of practice on the afternoon of Friday 15 January 2021.

### Higher and Advanced Higher

- Link to the SQA website and [exam timetable for 2020/21](#).
- Please refer to attendance management procedures for authorised absence: **Study leave for pupils participating in national exams, if arranged by the school during the period of the national examination timetable** [Included Engaged Involved Pt 1 - SEEMiS Attendance Codes](#)
- Continue to **enter assessment arrangement requests on the AAR system** for Higher and Advanced Higher examinations. Principles and procedures to follow when providing assessment arrangements: [Assessment Arrangements Explained: Information for centres](#)

### Good practice zone

- Balerno High School <https://balernochs.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/sqa-changes-to-higher-and-advanced-higher-courses-2020.pdf>
- Queensferry High School 2020-21 SQA MS Sway: <https://queensferryhigh.co.uk/index.php?p=1044>
- The Royal High School: <https://royalhigh.wordpress.com/senior-phase-assessments/>

March 2021