National Qualifications 2021 Alternative Certification Model (ACM):

Methodology Report

Contents

1 Context

In response to the continued disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic on society, the Deputy First Minister announced the cancellation of National 5 exams on 7 October 2020 and the cancellation of Higher and Advanced Higher exams on 8 December 2020.

SQA established the National Qualifications 2021 Group in October 2020 to provide advice on the development of the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) for National Qualifications in 2021. Given the disruption caused by the pandemic, it was vital that the education system worked together to ensure an appropriate balance between learning, teaching, and assessment.

A system-wide collaborative approach was also a recommendation of the *Rapid Review of National Qualifications Experience 2020* by Professor Mark Priestley. Regular reports on progress were provided to Ministers and the Education Recovery Group, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

The ACM for National 5 was published on 8 December 2020, and the same approach was adopted for Higher and Advanced Higher following the Deputy First Minister's announcement to cancel these exams. Revisions to the approach were published on 16 February 2021, following the move to remote learning in early January.

2   Approach

All partners involved in the National Qualifications 2021 Group agreed that at the heart of the ACM was demonstrated attainment — evidence of learning and skills. Based on that evidence, teachers and lecturers would exercise their professional judgement to determine provisional grades for learners.

Having evidence of a learner's skills and knowledge to award qualifications is important and is the cornerstone of our qualifications system's credibility. We know that colleges, universities and employers want to see this. It is also important for learners to have confidence in their qualifications, now and over time.

Teachers and lecturers know their learners and their individual circumstances best, and so the ACM gave schools, colleges and training providers flexibility around the timing and nature of assessment to ensure that, as far as possible, there was maximum opportunity for learners to undertake the required learning and be given the best chance to succeed in any course assessments.

A contingency arrangement was introduced for later certification for those young people who, through no fault of their own, were unable to provide completed evidence before the submission of provisional results because they had experienced particularly significant disruption.

Teachers and lecturers, with the support of the system and SQA, have worked hard to deliver the right results to learners, first time. However, a direct right of appeal is available, and the appeals service is the final essential part of the model.

Throughout the development of the model, we have had equalities at the heart of our thinking and have developed and published Equality Impact Assessments and Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments to inform our approaches and decisions, as well as to demonstrate our compliance with our statutory obligations.

3   Governance

3.1   Awarding 2021 Programme

To enable the planning and delivery of the ACM, a strategic SQA programme was set up led by SQA's Chief Executive that provided assurance to SQA's Board of Management. The programme was aligned to the work of the National Qualifications 2021 steering and working groups.

3.2   Engagement with stakeholders

The National Qualifications 2021 Group, made up of representatives from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Colleges Scotland, Education Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), School Leaders Scotland (SLS), the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the Scottish Government, National Parent Forum of Scotland, and the Scottish Youth Parliament, met weekly from the autumn to consider alternative certification arrangements for National Qualifications in the 2020–21 session. It was supported by a National Qualifications 2021 Working Group, which also met weekly.

The National Qualifications 2021 Steering and Working Groups have been key to the creation of the ACM, including the development of roles and responsibilities for each part of the education system, and the approach to the different levels of quality assurance. The groups worked to shared principles of engagement, collaboration, simplicity, communication and action in developing the end-to-end ACM process.

The Scottish Youth Parliament was commissioned by the SQA to set up a learner panel to facilitate engagement with learners during development of the ACM. It includes representation from learners in schools and colleges across Scotland, as well as young representatives from learner organisations. The panel ensures the views of young people are fully heard.

Membership is from a range of learner organisations including the Scottish Youth Parliament, Carers Trust Scotland, SPARQS (college learners) as well as from individual school and college learners. SQA organised a number of panels, covering topics such as quality assurance, disruption to learning, communications, and appeals.

SQA representatives also took part in online events with the National Parent Forum of Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland, Schools Leaders Scotland, and the Scottish Youth Parliament, in which parents and carers, teachers and lecturers and young people had the opportunity to hear about and ask questions on the model.

Throughout the development of the ACM, SQA's Advisory Council, Qualifications Committee and Board of Management advised on and considered the needs and views of SQA stakeholders in relation to qualifications and awards.

4. Method

A key principle of the ACM in 2021 is that awards are based on demonstrated attainment, with teachers and lecturers using quality assured assessment evidence to determine provisional results.

The National Qualifications 2021 Group developed a [five-stage plan for the ACM](#). This plan outlined the timeline for each stage, the context of the stage and the roles and responsibilities for stakeholders at each stage.

This was an iterative process, due to the changing public health requirements. Initially, the ACM was only in place for National 5, but was later expanded to include Higher and Advanced Higher.

Members of the working group also co-designed a number of tools to assist centres in working with the model. The tools included exemplars to record learners' evidence and assessments, including any assessment arrangements applied during assessments. SQA would like to acknowledge and thank members of the working group who also reviewed publications throughout the year, such as those supporting evidence gathering and the submission of provisional results.

The closure of schools and colleges from Monday 4 January 2021, and the move to online learning and teaching, required a further review of timelines. Even when learners were able to return, the need was recognised to allow time for completion of learning and teaching and consolidation of learning, before assessment took place. A revised version of the ACM was published in February 2021.

Following a recommendation from the National Qualifications 2021 Group, the Deputy First Minister agreed to extend the date for submission of provisional results to Friday 25 June. This allowed maximum time for learning and teaching, and consolidation of learning, before summative assessment and local and national quality assurance took place. It did mean, however, that there was no time for any further quality assurance checks after submission of provisional results. SQA only carried out checks for administrative errors once provisional results had been submitted.

The national quality assurance exercise was moved to late May/early June, to avoid putting pressure on learners, teachers and lecturers to carry out assessments before they were ready, and to allow sufficient assessment evidence to be available for SQA appointees to review.

The final stage of the ACM is the SQA appeals service. After a national consultation, SQA announced the service on Wednesday 2 June. The grounds for appeal are broad. There are three types of appeal:

♦ an appeal against the academic judgement that was made
♦ an appeal against an unresolved administrative error
♦ an appeal on grounds of discrimination where:

    — there has been a breach of the Equality Act 2010 (which must have been either acknowledged by the learner's school, college or training provider or established by an appropriate authority, or
    — a school, college or training provider failed to provide a learner with agreed assessment arrangements

This year, for the first time, learners can appeal directly to SQA for free. They have been able to register that they want to appeal since Friday 25 June. Appeals will be processed with the support of schools, colleges and training providers after learners have received their certificates on Tuesday 10 August.

Appendix 1 outlines the final version of the five-stage model co-created by the National Qualifications 2021 Group.

4.1 Modifications to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher course assessments

In August 2020, SQA undertook a national consultation to reduce the assessment requirements of courses. This was undertaken in recognition of the disruption to learning in 2020 and anticipated disruption in 2021. The modifications were published on Wednesday 7 October 2020.

The purpose of the modifications was to free up teaching and learning time, whilst maintaining the validity, credibility and standard of the qualifications. The consultation received over 23,000 responses from learners, parents, carers, teachers, lecturers, representative organisations and professional associations. Overall, feedback on the consultation was that proposed modifications were practical given the challenges we all faced.

We analysed all the feedback received and acted on it, publishing Outcomes of National Consultation, an Equalities Impact Assessment and a Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment.

Given the rapidly changing circumstances of the pandemic, we acted as quickly as possible to further adapt our assessment approach, in particular the delivery of practical and performance subjects, such as Music, Drama, Dance and PE, throughout the year, in consultation with subject specialists and colleagues in Education Scotland.

4.2 Subject specific guidance and assessment resources

The ACM included support and flexibility to help address the disruption to learning caused by the pandemic, including:

♦ subject-specific guidance on gathering evidence
♦ assessment resources, such as question papers and marking instructions, and where appropriate coursework assessment tasks
♦ Understanding Standards support materials

The programme of work included the development and publication of assessment resources for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications. This included providing subject-specific guidance on the evidence that centres could use to produce provisional results for learners.

To support teachers and lecturers, we published 116 subject-specific guidance documents on the subject pages of SQA's website and 134 individual assessment resources (question papers and marking instructions) on SQA's secure website.

We also provided teachers and lecturers with a significant programme of Understanding Standards materials and events across all subjects. These included guidance on making grading decisions, webinars, SQA Academy courses and audio presentations. While many of these were existing resources, we also provided new webinars for 34 subjects, new audio presentations for 52 subjects, new candidate evidence and commentaries for 56 subjects, and additional support materials for 47 subjects.

4.3 Quality assurance exercise

Quality assurance was integrated into each stage of the ACM **prior to submission of the provisional results to SQA on Friday 25 June**. The quality assurance package underpinning the ACM included:

♦ Subject-specific guidance on suitable assessment evidence. This would help inform and support centre assessment planning and evidence gathering.
♦ New materials and webinars in SQA's established Understanding Standards programme to further exemplify national standards.
♦ Internal quality assurance in schools, colleges and training providers with schools engaging in local authority, Regional Improvement Collaboratives, subject networks and inter-school quality assurance processes.
♦ SQA's national quality assurance exercise involving sampling of all centres delivering National Courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher levels, providing individual subject-specific feedback to centres and key message reports for use by all centres.
♦ Centres reflecting on the feedback from centre, local and national quality assurance, and adjusting provisional results as necessary to ensure assessments were in line with the national standards.

As part of this work, the Deputy First Minister requested that HM Inspectors of Education undertake a review of local authority approaches to quality assurance. The national review provided an independent view about what was working well, and areas for improvement so that these could be addressed before provisional results were submitted to SQA. The review included looking at how teachers reported their confidence in understanding and applying standards taking into account the Understanding Standards activity provided by SQA.

The report — *National review of local authority approaches to quality assurance as part of the alternative certification model* — was positive and commended the efforts being made by schools, local authorities, and the wider education system to ensure national standards were maintained. It also commended local authorities for their flexibility in delaying early timetable changes in June to maximise the potential for learning and teaching.

The report outlined that local authority officers and headteachers value the contribution of SQA appointees in supporting teachers' confidence levels and contributing to the ACM quality assurance process. The report stated, 'Where appointees are used well, they are sharing their experience and providing valuable help and support to colleagues.'

4.3.1 Selection strategy

For the national quality assurance exercise, SQA selected courses from every school, college and training provider (centres) delivering national courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

When deciding on the strategy for selecting courses from centres, two options were considered:

♦ A non-statistical approach with manual selections made on a proportionate basis using anonymised data, with final selections manually sense-checked to ensure all centre types and local authorities were included. This approach provided centre and subject-specific feedback to each selected centre, as well as reports on key messages/themes published to support all centres delivering national courses. The subject-specific feedback would be on the validity of the assessment approach and reliability of marking to the national standard, as exemplified through Understanding Standards.

♦ A statistical approach, sampling centres offering each course and inferring findings from that sample to all centres who offer the course. This would provide the same collated feedback to all centres for that course, whether they were sampled or not.

The first option was chosen, as it allowed for individual feedback reports to be provided to every centre on the evidence submitted for their selections, in addition to key message reports providing feedback to all centres for the vast majority of national courses. Also, this option allowed for targeted selections to be made of centres who were delivering a subject for the first time, as a developmental support measure.

4.3.2 Selections

The following rules were applied in determining selections:

♦ every centre delivering National Courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher were to be selected at least once for national quality assurance
♦ each centre was selected for only one level per subject
♦ the number of selections for each centre was proportionate to the number and range of subjects that it delivers
♦ every subject and level were to be selected, proportionately to uptake, across all centres

For the national quality assurance exercise, assessed evidence from five learners, selected by the centre, was submitted to SQA. Centres were not required to submit the full evidence base to be used to determine the learner's provisional results. Partial or incomplete candidate evidence was sufficient, and this could be provided in paper or digital form.

There were 467 centres with entries for 155 subjects at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. The number of subjects offered by individual centres ranged from one to 37.

A key element of the selection strategy was that a sliding scale was applied to generate the number of selections for each centre – from one selection up to a maximum of six for the centres delivering the highest number of subjects, giving the following numbers of selections:

Total selections	**1555**	
National 5	524	*(5.7% of all course/centre entries at this level)*
Higher	681	*(8.1% of all course/centre entries at this level)*
Advanced Higher	350	*(8.7% of all course/centre entries at this level)*

Although higher numbers of selections were originally planned, it was agreed to adjust the thresholds within the sliding scale to reduce the total numbers for the final selections. This was due to:

♦ the extended period of remote learning and the need to complete learning and teaching and to consolidate learning before carrying out assessments
♦ the need to move the timescales for the national quality assurance exercise back to late May/end June to avoid undue pressure on learners and centre staff and to allow for sufficient assessment evidence to be available, within the extremely tight period to complete the exercise
♦ the amount of release time available for senior appointees (for standardisation purposes) and the timescales in which they had to complete the reviews of evidence and report on them, all in their own time

4.3.3 Timescales and constraints

We asked senior appointees to get involved as they are experienced in applying the standards of their subject/level, thereby reducing the need for them to be released from their centre during working hours for standardisation and training purposes. It also minimised the time required for producing the feedback and key message reports. The review of evidence and writing of reports was carried out in the senior appointees' own time to further minimise release from their centre.

The timing and scope of the national quality assurance exercise was critical to ensure that centres had gathered some assessment evidence for appointees to review, while also providing sufficient time for centres to take onboard the feedback from the exercise before they submitted provisional results to SQA. This, combined with appointee availability, constrained the total number of selections that could be made.

While this was not what was originally envisaged, the flexibility in the model provided a practical solution to the changing context of the pandemic.

4.3.4 Outputs of the national quality assurance exercise

All appointees involved in the exercise were trained and worked closely with SQA staff. All the reports were subject to a robust check by senior appointees and SQA staff before being published. This ensured consistency of approach and supportive feedback to centres that they could action quickly and in good time before provisional results had to be submitted to SQA.

4.3.5 Feedback reports

A subject-specific feedback report was produced for each selection, and the centres received these through SQA Connect.

The feedback reports were designed to give qualitative feedback specific to the evidence provided by the individual centre for the course selected. This covered comments on the approach to assessment; whether assessment judgements were in line with national standards, with reasons; and, where necessary, recommendations on adjustments to make.

Teachers and lecturers were asked to reflect on the reports, act on the feedback received and make adjustments as necessary, to ensure assessment judgements were in line with the national standards.

Centres were not required to respond to SQA about any action they took. However, heads of centre were required to sign a statement of assurance (co-designed by the National Qualifications 2021 Working Group) at the point of submission of provisional results, which included confirmation that adjustments had been made as required.

4.3.6 Key Message reports

The Key Message reports were written by subject Principal Assessors, collating information from each centre feedback report. The reports were published on the subject-specific pages of SQA's website during the week beginning 7 June, for all centres delivering the subject to view and make any appropriate adjustments to their application of national standards.

109 Key Message reports were published, mostly for individual courses with five or more selections. Some reports were produced for subjects with fewer than five selections, where there was sufficient evidence covering the course requirements. One report covered National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Gàidhlig. Both good practice and issues of concern were highlighted. There were no references to individual centres or candidates in the reports.

The reports provided information on any common themes and key points identified in the evidence submitted and reviewed across all the selections. This was split into points relating to:

♦ assessment approaches, with reference to the subject-specific guidance on key pieces of evidence
♦ assessment judgements, in relation to the national standard

During this time centres would start to develop provisional results based on the available learner evidence and feedback from local and national quality assurance, including checking that results were consistent across the centre and based on learner evidence.

A good volume and range of evidence was submitted and reported on — question paper, assignments, projects and practical activities (photo, video). Question paper evidence was the type most frequently submitted.

The reports indicated that assessments had generally been used effectively. A variety of assessment resources were used — SQA resources, where used, were normally used in combination with other assessment resources, including commercially-produced questions papers and centre-devised

papers using questions from various SQA past papers. Unit assessments and end-of-topic tests were provided as supplementary evidence in some cases.

The comments on assessment judgements presented a positive picture overall. For the majority of selections, the assessment judgements were fully in line with national standards. Only very small numbers were not in line with national standards or had not provided sufficient evidence on which to base a judgement about this. There were some instances of lenient or severe marking or inconsistent application of marking instructions. Those centres that were not fully in line with national standards were given advice on how to address this. SQA did not make any adjustments to grades awarded by centres during the national quality assurance exercise.

There were many positive references in the reports to evidence of thorough and effective centre and local quality assurance — including inter-school, local authority, Regional Improvement Collaboratives and subject networks.

4.4   Provisional results

As part of the ACM, schools, colleges and training providers were responsible for submitting learners' provisional results to SQA by Friday 25 June 2021.

Once provisional results were submitted to SQA, we did not change them unless, in a very small number of cases, an administrative error was discovered.

Schools, colleges and training providers were required throughout the session to keep learners informed of progress in reaching their provisional results. This was supported by the National Qualifications 2021 Group to aid learners' wellbeing and provide transparency in how provisional results were determined.

4.5   Disruption to learning and the incomplete evidence contingency arrangement

The ACM was flexible enough to take account of the disruption to learning caused by the pandemic, while still maintaining the credibility of the qualifications — for example, providing flexibility on how and when assessments were undertaken to meet the circumstances of individual learners and extending the deadline for provisional results to maximise teaching and assessment time.

An incomplete evidence contingency arrangement was also introduced for those learners who, through no fault of their own, were unable to provide completed evidence before Friday 25 June, because of experiencing particularly significant disruption. Teachers and lecturers, in consultation with learners and their parents/carers, could decide that the learner could complete assessments when schools, colleges and training providers re-open after the summer holidays, and submit provisional results for them by noon on Friday 3 September.

Our system shows that there are 465 entries, for 282 learners, registered for the incomplete evidence contingency arrangement. As per the notes pages of SQA's August 2021 attainment statistics, these entries are excluded from our August 2021 attainment figures. Results for these learners will be added to the attainment statistics to be published in December 2021, after the conclusion of the appeals process.

Appendix 1: The five stages of the ACM

(Including roles and responsibilities for key stakeholders)

Working with the 2021 National Qualifications Group, a five-stage plan was outlined for the ACM and published on SQA's website. This plan outlined the timeline for each stage, the context of the stage and the roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders.

Stage 1: November 2020 until April 2021

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

What happens at this stage

♦   Learning, teaching and assessment (to guide further support for learners) together with consolidation of learning, are ongoing.
♦   Subject-specific guidance on selecting the appropriate learner evidence is available for all subjects at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.
♦   National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher assessment resources are available to help inform assessment planning and evidence-gathering.
♦   SQA supports schools and colleges by adding new materials and webinars to its established Understanding Standards programme.
♦   Schools and colleges are supported by local and national networks.
♦   Schools and colleges further develop assessment plans (including any assessment arrangements needed for individual learners) and become familiar with internal quality assurance arrangements for learner assessments, including standardisation of all assessment instruments and marking instructions, sampling of assessment evidence and teacher marking to ensure that national standards are being applied consistently.
♦   Schools and colleges carry out internal quality assurance processes in line with agreed procedures and engage in local authority / RIC activity as appropriate.

Roles and responsibilities

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

Role of SQA
♦   Produce generic guidance on producing estimates (published Nov 2020) (now called 'provisional results').

November/December 2020 — for National 5:

♦   Produce subject-specific guidance clarifying assessment requirements.
♦   Publish and promote subject-specific assessment resources for centres to use.
♦   Provide Understanding Standards resources and activities.

January/February 2021 — For Higher and Advanced Higher:

♦ Produce subject-specific guidance clarifying assessment requirements.
♦ Publish and promote subject-specific assessment resources for centres to use.

January – April 2021 for all levels:

♦ Provide Understanding Standards resources and activities.
♦ Provide direct advice and support to centres, on request, where queries have not been addressed in guidance.

Role of teachers/lecturers
♦ Teaching and learning ongoing — planning opportunities for assessment, in line with subject-specific guidance from SQA.
♦ Engage with Understanding Standards activities.
♦ Participate, as appropriate, in local and/or national subject networks.
♦ Develop assessment plans and assess learners' assessment evidence when appropriate.
♦ Ensure familiarity with centre and local internal quality assurance arrangements on learner assessments (this includes pre-assessment agreement of assessment instruments, standardisation activities and sampling of learners' assessment evidence to ensure that marking is consistent with national standards).

Role of centre senior management
♦ Support teachers and lecturers in their roles and responsibilities.
♦ Ensure that teaching staff are aware of, and using, SQA guidance on assessment and producing provisional results.
♦ Ensure that the centre's quality assurance procedures are being defined and made available to staff.
♦ In colleges, to support course teams, set up internal quality assurance systems to support/facilitate:

  — Understanding Standards
  — centre-level assessment approaches

Role of local authorities/Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS)/Education Scotland
Local authorities: consider how best to support/facilitate:

♦ Understanding Standards.
♦ Centre-level assessment approaches.
♦ Centre-level quality assurance.
♦ Local authority/area-based subject quality assurance.
♦ Quality assurance support by subject from Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC), where a need is identified.
♦ Access to local SQA appointees to support identified subject areas.

SCIS:

♦ Share key messages with members.
♦ Provide a service to link schools to support external quality assurance.
♦ Facilitate a series of virtual communities of practice (V-CoPs) for subject specialists, with access to sector SQA appointees as appropriate.
♦ Facilitate virtual meetings with SQA co-ordinators and senior leaders.

♦ Share practice from across the sector to enable reflection, discussion and action.

Education Scotland:

♦ Continue supporting centres and practitioners in providing learning, teaching and assessment to inform next steps, including through remote learning.
♦ Through National e-Learning Offer, provide well-targeted and easily accessible:

— live, interactive webinars for study support and other provision
— recorded lessons
— supported materials

♦ Work with practitioners to identify priority resources required.
♦ Arrange professional learning opportunities in using digital platforms for effective remote learning, and subject-specific webinars for delivering NQs remotely.
♦ Provide a national overview of practice in the delivery of remote learning.
♦ Support local and national curriculum networks to share practice and quality assurance approaches. Provide signposting for practitioners to support them to network with practitioners for quality assurance purposes.
♦ Work with all RICs and local authorities to develop online solutions for sharing learner evidence to support quality assurance processes in local authorities and schools.
♦ Provide clarity and support for local authorities and centres on preparing arrangements for small groups of senior-phase learners to return to school to complete the learning and teaching of critical practical work that can only be carried out in school.
♦ Provide support to school leaders and local authorities for the leadership required to take forward the 2021 ACM arrangements through facilitated, themed online conversations, Headspace and Blethers.

Existing subject-specific and other collaborative support networks such as those already set up by local authorities, RICs and Education Scotland will be used to support teachers.

Stage 2: April to May 2021

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

What happens at this stage?

♦ Learning, teaching and assessment (to guide further support for learners) together with consolidation of learning, are ongoing.
♦ Schools and colleges put in place and record any assessment arrangements required by individual learners.
♦ Schools and colleges assess learner evidence, carrying out and recording decisions in line with internal quality assurance procedures.
♦ Schools and colleges continue to provide feedback to learners on progress, including results based on evidence.
♦ Schools and colleges continue to carry out and engage in internal quality assurance in line with their procedures and local authority / RIC quality assurance processes.

- 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.
- Schools and colleges start to develop provisional results based on the available learner evidence and feedback from local and national quality assurance, including checking that results are consistent across the centre and based on learner evidence.
- Schools, colleges or local authorities can speak to SQA if further support is desired.
- SQA issues further information on how to submit the provisional results.

Roles and responsibilities

Learning, teaching and assessment (to guide further support for learners) together with consolidation of learning, are ongoing. School, college, training provider and local authority quality assurance continues. During May, SQA requests, reviews and provides feedback on assessment evidence from each school and college as part of national quality assurance.

Role of SQA
- during May, issue selections to centres
- receive assessment evidence from centres for the subjects/levels
- externally quality assure marked learners' assessment evidence from every centre, to ensure that marking is to the national standard
- provide subject-specific feedback for National Courses to centres (and the local authority, where appropriate) on the extent to which assessment approaches were valid and marking was reliable and to the national standard and provide advice on any adjustments that need to be made
- obtain a declaration from the head of centre that the feedback from SQA has been acted on within the centre
- collate any common issues from national quality assurance for each National Course and publish this to inform all centres
- issue further information on how to submit the provisional results

Roles of teachers/lecturers
- Learning, teaching and consolidation of learning continues.
- Assess learner evidence.
- Carry out internal quality assurance on learner assessment evidence, in line with centre procedures (and local authority / RIC quality assurance processes for local authority schools). This includes pre-assessment agreement of assessment instruments, standardisation activities and sampling of learners' assessment evidence to ensure that national standards are being applied consistently.
- If selected for SQA quality assurance for a subject/level, submit assessment instruments, marking instructions and examples of assessed learner evidence. 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.
- Act on any feedback received from SQA's quality assurance, to ensure that assessment is consistent with the national standard.
- Share any relevant feedback from SQA's quality assurance with others, for example through local subject networks.

♦ Start to develop provisional results based on the available evidence and feedback from local and national quality assurance.

Role of centre senior management
♦ Continue to support teachers and lecturers in their roles and responsibilities in relation to assessment and centre quality assurance.
♦ Support and facilitate teaching staff awareness and use of SQA guidance on assessment and producing provisional results.
♦ Support and facilitate the consistent application of centre's quality assurance procedures.
♦ Support teachers and lecturers in their roles and responsibilities within the national quality assurance process.
♦ Support and facilitate teaching staff to act on any feedback received from SQA's quality assurance, to ensure that marking is consistent with national standard.
♦ Act on feedback received from SQA's quality assurance process to consider the effectiveness of the centre's quality assurance process and any adjustments required.
♦ Provide a declaration from the head of centre that the feedback from SQA's quality assurance has been acted on within the centre.
♦ Carry out checks that results are consistent with evidence, to inform any initial discussions within the centre.

Role of local authorities/Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS)/Education Scotland
♦ Local authorities and independent schools should consider capacity to support the national quality assurance exercise by releasing a limited number of appointees to undertake this work if required.
♦ Identify and provide any additional support based on the findings of SQA's quality assurance.
♦ Education Scotland will continue work from Phase 1 with RICs, local authorities and schools to identify and provide further support to centres and practitioners.
♦ Education Scotland will provide support to school leaders and local authorities for the leadership required to take forward the 2021 ACM arrangements through facilitated, themed online conversations, Headspace and Blethers.

Stage 3: End of May to 25 June 2021

Schools, colleges, 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.

What happens at this stage?

♦ Learning, teaching and assessment should be concluding for the purposes of certification in 2020–21.
♦ Schools and colleges provide ongoing assessment feedback to learners, including provisional grades based on evidence.
♦ Schools, colleges and local authorities complete final stages of quality assurance, taking account of feedback from the prior stages.
♦ Schools and colleges record provisional results based on evidence of demonstrated attainment for each learner.
♦ Schools and colleges record any learner eligible for the incomplete evidence contingency arrangement.

- ♦ Heads of centre sign off the outcomes per subject, and local authorities endorse the process and engagement in reaching those outcomes.

Roles and responsibilities

Continuation and completion of learning, teaching and assessment in centres. Provisional results will be produced by teachers and lecturers and quality assurance will be carried out internally by centres and then more widely by local networks. This may include exploration of rationales for variances and dialogue with SQA. Any adjustments would be made based on current candidate evidence.

Role of SQA
- ♦ Encourage use of existing published training materials for centres and local authorities on how best to check results during local quality assurance of provisional results, while ensuring that these are firmly based on current candidate evidence.

Role of teachers/lecturers
- ♦ Complete learning, teaching and assessment and continue internal quality assurance.
- ♦ Reflect on feedback from national quality assurance and make adjustments as appropriate.
- ♦ Provide ongoing feedback to learners regarding their progress and assessments, including, at the conclusion of the course, provisional grades based on evidence of demonstrated attainment.
- ♦ Produce provisional results for every candidate with the exception of any candidate utilising the incomplete evidence contingency arrangement. These candidates should be identified on the provisional results system.

Role of centre senior management
- ♦ Carry out centre quality assurance on provisional results, prior to submission to SQA, including checking that provisional results are based on current learner evidence.
- ♦ Engage in any further local quality assurance on provisional results with the local authority, clusters/partner schools, as appropriate to the centre.
- ♦ Local quality assurance could also include dialogue with SQA where the centre requests further support.
- ♦ Make any adjustments to provisional results and/or processes required as a result of centre, local and/or national quality assurance. Any adjustments would be made on the basis of current candidate evidence.
- ♦ Endorse the process and results per subject and level.
- ♦ Ensure that the incomplete evidence contingency arrangement is only being used in circumstances where the learner has completed the learning and teaching of the course and has completed some, but not all of the required assessment, due to severe disruption during the evidence-gathering process.
- ♦ In colleges, constitute an internal quality assurance panel, building on processes implemented in 2020, support/challenge conversations.
- ♦ In colleges, implement a process for endorsing the course team's results, considering:

  — the processes used by the course team
  — the outcome of the checking exercise
  — the rationale for any variances

Role of local authorities/Scottish Council for Independent Schools (SCIS)/Education Scotland
Local authorities:

- Local authorities should consider how best to support/facilitate:

  — centre-level quality assurance
  — local authority/area-based subject quality assurance, perhaps through subject networks
  — RICs-level subject quality assurance, where a need is identified

- Local authorities should develop and implement processes for the checking stage, building on processes implemented in 2020. This should include:

  — the processes implemented by the school/centre
  — the outcome of the checking exercise
  — the rationale for any variances
  — this could also include engagement with schools/centres to agree a model for corresponding school/centre level checks and endorsement

- Local authorities engage with schools and centres to consider centre data by subject. internal checking processes provide a rationale for the centre's assessment judgements and may lead to a review of candidate evidence, if required, using local subject expertise.
- Appropriate local authority senior officer endorses the process and notes the outcomes per centre.

SCIS
- Share key messages with members.
- Provide a service to link schools to support external quality assurance.
- Facilitate a series of virtual communities of practice (v-cops) for subject specialists.
- Facilitate virtual meetings with SQA co-ordinators and senior leaders.
- Share practice from across the sector to enable reflection, discussion and action.
- Assist in awareness-raising of issues for consideration by schools.

Education Scotland
- Provide further professional learning for good practice, including through technical solutions, that highlights ease of sharing learner evidence on a range of formats and supports practitioners with good practice in quality assurance.
- Provide support to school leaders for the leadership required to take forward the 2021 ACM arrangements through facilitated, themed online conversations, Headspace and Blethers.

Stage 4: By 25 June 2021

Schools and colleges submit quality assured provisional results to SQA.

What happens at this stage?

- Schools and colleges submit provisional results or identify learners using the incomplete evidence contingency arrangement by 25 June.
- SQA undertakes administrative checks and addresses any queries with centres (eg potential data inputting errors).
- Schools and colleges retain learner assessment evidence.

Roles and responsibilities

♦ Submission of provisional results by centres to SQA.
♦ Identification of learners using incomplete evidence contingency arrangement.
♦ SQA undertakes administrative checks and addresses any queries with centres (eg potential data inputting errors).

Role of centres
♦ Centres to provide a named contact who is able to deal with administrative queries regarding provisional results after the submission date.
♦ Centres retain learner assessment evidence and records.

Stage 5: Appeals process for 2020–21

A free appeals service, available directly to learners for the first time, is the fifth and final stage of the alternative certification model.

What happens at this stage?

Once learners have discussed their provisional results with their teacher or lecturer, if they are still unhappy, they can register that they want to appeal directly on SQA's website. The registration service opened on Friday 25 June and will close on Thursday 12 August. Appeals will be processed after Results Day on Tuesday 10 August.

If learners are waiting on a result for a university or college place or for an employment or training programme, their appeal will be processed as a priority. If they do not register with SQA by Thursday 12 August, they can ask their teacher or lecturer to submit a priority appeal for them until Tuesday 24 August.

If they do not need to use the priority service, learners can still ask their teacher or lecturer to submit an appeal to SQA for them until Friday 27 August.

Roles and responsibilities

♦ Learners should be supported by their school, college and training provider with the information they need to make decisions that are in their best interests.
♦ Schools, colleges and training providers cannot stop an appeal request.
♦ Schools, colleges and training providers will still be able to submit an appeal on behalf of their learners, if the learner prefers to use that route.
♦ SQA will inform schools, colleges and training providers that their learners have registered that they want to appeal.
♦ Schools, colleges and training providers will provide SQA with the necessary evidence that was used to determine their learners' results.
♦ SQA will discuss appeals against an unresolved administrative error or on grounds of discrimination with schools, colleges or training providers.
♦ Schools, colleges or training providers can advise SQA of any administrative errors they identify.
♦ Once appeals are completed, SQA will inform schools, colleges and training providers of the outcomes and they will tell their learners.

♦ If there has been a change to any grades, SQA will issue learners with a replacement certificate later in the year.

Appendix 2: Timeline

October 2020

> **07** - DFM announced National 5 examination diet for 2021 cancelled and that courses will be assessed using an alternative certification model.

December 2020

> **08** - DFM announced Higher and Advanced Higher examination diet cancelled for 2021 and that courses will be assessed using an alternative certification model.
>
> DFM announced for 2020-21 National 5 to be based on teacher and lecturer judgement.
>
> **16** - SQA announced that work was ongoing for the contingency arrangements for Higher & Advanced Higher.

January 2021

> **04** - FM announced remote learning to operate until at least the beginning of February.
>
> **19** - FM announced remote learning to continue until mid-February.
>
> **27** - Final date for schools, colleges and training providers to submit provisional grades was extended from Friday 28 May 2021 to Friday 25 June 2021.

February 2021

> **16** - Alternative Certification Model confirmed for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, along with the roles and responsibilities for all parts of the Scottish education system.

March 2021

> **01** - FM announces that secondary school pupils will return to spend some time in school from 15 March – with a clear expectation that all will be back in school on a full-time basis after the Easter holidays.

April 2021

> **13** - Stage 2 of the Alternative Certification Model – evidence gathering.

May 2021

> **10** - Statement from National Qualifications 2021 Group on Disruption to Learning.

June 2021

> **02** - Contingency arrangement for Incomplete Evidence announced.
>
> 2021 Appeals Service announced.