

What you need to know for 2021 SQA qualifications



A guide
for employers



This guide for employers explains what happened with SQA National Qualifications and Higher National and vocational qualifications in 2020–21, and how learners were assessed this year.

SQA worked with partners* from across the education and training system to deliver assessment approaches that could be used under COVID restrictions — and that allowed for the disruption to teaching and learning that COVID caused this year. We did this both for National Qualifications and for Higher National and vocational qualifications.

This year's assessment approaches put learners front and centre, ensuring that they were assessed in a way that is valid, reliable, practical, equitable and fair.

We are committed to ensuring that learners across Scotland get the results they deserve and have the knowledge and skills they need to progress to further learning or work.

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National Qualifications

National 1 to National 4

National 1 to National 4 qualifications were assessed and marked by teachers and lecturers this year, as usual.

National 5, Higher & Advanced Higher

The 2021 National 5, Higher & Advanced Higher exams were cancelled due to the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This year's **alternative certification model** provides a different way to determine learner results.

We expected a lot of disruption to learning this session, so we reduced the evidence required for each National Course to the minimum while making sure the qualifications remain valid and credible.

We introduced more flexibility around how and when assessments needed to be done, and extended the date for teachers and lecturers to send provisional results to us to help provide more learning and teaching time.

“ National Qualifications continue to provide some of the essential skills needed in the workplace. They will always be valued by Scottish Power as we work to give young people the best possible start in their career.

Caryn Jack, Head of Asset Management Scottish Power

Alternative certification model

The ACM was created in partnership with the National Qualifications 2021 Group*, which includes representatives from across the education system.

This year, teachers/lecturers will use learners' school/college assessments as evidence to decide their results. (We call this 'demonstrated attainment'.)

The ACM has five stages:

1

Until April: Teachers and lecturers accessed subject-specific guidance, assessment resources and Understanding Standards materials and webinars from SQA.

2

April – May: School, college and local authority quality assurance continues. SQA requested, reviewed and provided feedback on samples of assessment evidence.

3

End of May to 25 June: Schools, colleges, local authorities and SQA concluded local and national quality assurance to reach provisional results that are consistent, equitable and fair.

4

By 25 June: Schools and colleges submitted quality assured provisional results to SQA.

5

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

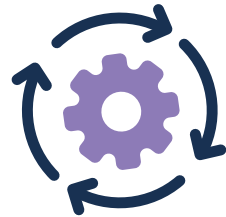
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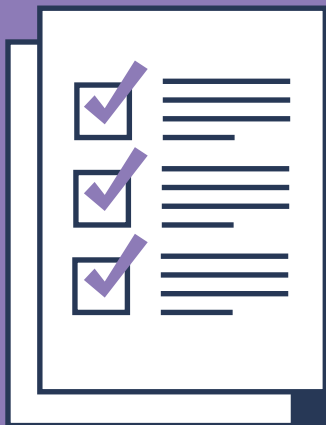
In this hugely challenging year, we have worked with partners from across Scottish education and training, to ensure learners are assessed in a way that is valid, reliable, practical, equitable and fair.

Our thanks to everyone who has supported the design and delivery of alternative assessment approaches during this very difficult time – they have worked tirelessly to support their learners.”

John McMorris,

Director of Business Development at SQA





Quality assurance

Quality assurance is at the heart of fair and credible certification this year.

A strong set of checks were carried out by schools, colleges, training providers, local authorities and SQA to support teachers' and lecturers' decisions.

The results that a teacher or lecturer give learners are **provisional results**.

SQA will not change provisional results. We will check for any administrative errors that may occur when schools, colleges and training providers enter the data into the system.

Quality assurance helps to make sure that results are decided consistently across the country. It is carried out in schools (with support from local authorities where appropriate), colleges and training providers, as well as by SQA.

Local quality assurance is carried out by a school, college or training provider — often in partnership with a local authority or other schools or colleges — and involves looking at assessment evidence to help make sure that learners' results are consistent and fair across the whole of Scotland.

National quality assurance is carried out by SQA. This helps make sure that the way a teacher or lecturer has assessed evidence is appropriate and consistent with the national standard. It involves looking at examples of assessment evidence from all schools, colleges and training providers.

Together, local and national quality assurance help to make sure that an A grade in the north of Scotland is worth the same as an A grade in the south of Scotland and everywhere in between.



Higher National & Vocational Qualifications

We also developed alternative approaches for assessing Higher National and vocational qualifications in 2020–21.

This is separate to the alternative certification model being used for National Qualifications.

The approach was developed to provide greater flexibility for centres and learners during the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, whilst maintaining the integrity of certification and public confidence.

This year, assessment of Higher National and vocational qualifications could be based on a holistic, professional judgement that assessed candidate evidence relative to the course aims and, for some awards, a set of critical competence requirements.

This aimed to confirm whether learners have demonstrated overall competence in these requirements.

You can see full details of this approach, along with a range of subject-specific guidance and supporting resources, at www.sqa.org.uk/HNVQ2021.



National Qualifications 2021 Group

*The National Qualifications 2021 Group includes representation 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.

Higher National and Vocational Qualifications 2021 Group

*The Higher National and Vocational Qualifications 2021 Group includes representation from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Colleges Scotland, the College Vice Principal Forum, Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), Educational Institute of Scotland - Further Education Lecturers' Association (EIS-FELA), the National Union of Students (NUS), the Scottish Funding Council, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Training Federation, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Skills Development Scotland (SDS), and Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (SPARQs).



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