



Analysis of consultation responses

Consultation on contingency arrangements for the 2021 examination timetable.

October 2020

Version 1.0

1 Purpose

This report provides an analysis of responses to SQA's consultation on contingency arrangements for the 2021 examination timetable of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses. The consultation involved the established SQA Examination Timetable Advisory Group, made up of a range of stakeholders including representatives from schools, colleges, teaching unions, local authorities, and parent groups. SQA's Advisory Council, SQA Appointees and young people were also involved in the consultation.

The planned 2021 examination timetable was due to start on Monday 26 April 2021 and finish on Thursday 3 June 2021. As there may be disruption due to COVID-19, we have developed a number of contingency models for the timetable.

The purpose of the consultation, which ran from Friday 14 to Monday 24 August 2020, was to understand the impact of the proposed models and to inform any decision on the possibility of delaying the start of the examination timetable to mid-May, with certification on Thursday 19 August 2021.

This report provides a summary of the consultation and its outcomes.

The consultation exercise demonstrated some support for a delay to the start of exams. However, much of this was caveated by highlighting risks to the safe delivery of certification in 2021 and a negative impact on the start of the 2021–22 academic year. We therefore proposed that the timetable dates remain unchanged and the certification date for 2021 remain as 10 August 2021.

Since completing the consultation, the Deputy First Minister has announced that there will be no National 5 exams in 2021. The 2021 Higher and Advanced Higher exam timetable will therefore start on Thursday 13 May and finish on Friday 4 June 2021, with Results Day on Tuesday 10 August 2021. Although this gives around two weeks additional time for teaching, learning and study for those taking these exams, it does mean that for some candidates their exams will be close together. We will publish the full exam timetable at the end of October.

A technical consultation on proposed modifications to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help support the delivery of learning and teaching while maintaining the validity, credibility and standard of qualifications, was run simultaneously. The findings are summarised in the [consultation report](#).

2 Background

The Scottish Government's *Coronavirus (COVID-19): strategic framework for reopening schools, early learning and childcare provision*¹ makes it clear that a full timetable of SQA exams and coursework is planned at all levels in 2021.

However, we recognise the impact that COVID-19 has had, and will continue to have, on learning and teaching, and the remaining risk of disruption to the amount of teaching that can be delivered in session 2020–21.

We have looked at a number of contingency arrangements for the examination timetable, to deal with potential disruption to the 2021 Exam Diet of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses. These included using the current published Results Day of Tuesday 10 August 2021, use of weekends for exams, delaying the start of the timetable by three weeks, and delaying the start of exams and changing the order of exams to have all National 5 exams at the start of the timetable, giving more time to Highers and Advanced Highers. Delaying the start of the exams would require moving the certification date to Thursday 19 August 2021.

On Friday 14 August 2020 SQA launched a consultation on contingency arrangements for the 2021 examination timetable of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses. The purpose of the consultation was to understand the impact of a number of contingency models for the timetable and to inform the decision on whether to delay the start of the examination timetable to mid-May, with certification on Thursday 19 August 2021.

¹ Scottish Government (2020) *Coronavirus (COVID-19): strategic framework for reopening schools, early learning and childcare provision* [online]. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/excellent-equity-during-covid-19-pandemic-strategic-framework-reopening-schools-early-learning-childcare-provision-scotland/pages/6/>

3 Method

Four separate groups were consulted on the proposals: The time available to undertake the surveys and consultations was short. This resulted in a limited response from some of the groups surveyed. However, there was a high degree of consensus from all four groups. Both Quantitative and Qualitative responses were sought, and any reservations about support for the proposals were carefully considered.

SQA Examination Timetable Advisory Group

A group of 21 stakeholders, including representatives from school head teachers, local authorities, SQA co-ordinators, colleges, chief invigilators, teaching unions and parent organisations. We consult this group every year on the finalised exam timetable before publication.

An electronic survey was sent to the 21 members of the group.

SQA's Advisory Council

The Advisory Council includes a wide range of stakeholders from schools, colleges, local authorities, professional associations, employer representatives, and parents and carers. It is established under the Advisory Council (Establishment) (Scotland) Regulations 2002. Members are appointed by Scottish Ministers. The Council advises SQA on their needs and views in relation to our qualifications and awards.

A discussion was held with the Advisory Council to gather their views on the timetable contingency proposals.

Young people

A discussion was held with representatives from Young Scot, the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children and Young People's Commissioner to understand the views of young people.

SQA appointees

All appointees who undertake marking for National Qualifications were sent an electronic survey, to establish their willingness to participate in marking and procedural events should the delay to the timetable be implemented.

4 Consultation analysis

4.1 Examination Timetable Advisory Group

Members of the Timetable Advisory Group were consulted on the following questions:

Timetable Advisory Group questions	
Number	Question
1	Any delay to the timetable will move certification date from 10 August 2021 to 19 August 2021 (the same as the Rest of the UK). Are you comfortable with a move in certification date?
2	Please explain your reasons for your choice, listing any positive and negative implications.
3	Please indicate the viability of the alternative models identified by selecting the most appropriate option below. Option 1 (Start Date — 17 May 2021 End Date — 23 June 2021 Certification Date — 19 August 2021) Option 2 (Start Date — 13 May 2021 End Date — 23 June 2021 Certification Date — 19 August 2021).
4	Please explain your reasons for your choice, listing any positive and negative implications.
5	Another alternative model is scheduling the timetable by level, so National 5 exams would be at the start of the timetable, giving more teaching and learning time to Higher and Advanced Higher learners. Please provide your thoughts on the viability of this approach.
6	Having evaluated the potential alternative models please indicate your preference by selecting one of the options below.
7	Please provide further information to support your preference.
8	Do you think there are any potential equality impacts that should be considered in relation to the alternative models?
9	Please provide any other suggested changes to the exam timetable you would like SQA to consider.

Twelve responses were received to this survey. One organisation subsequently responded by email and their comments have been incorporated into this report.

Summary of responses — Question 1

Q1	Any delay to the timetable will move certification date from 10 August 2021 to 19 August 2021 (the same as the Rest of the UK). Are you comfortable with a move in certification date?
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This question asked respondents to select the response that best indicated their position on a potential move of the certification date. The following responses were received:

Response	Volume	%
Strongly support	4	33%
Support	6	50%
Oppose	2	17%
Strongly oppose	0	0%
Total	12	100%

Overall, **83%** of respondents indicated their support of a potential move of the certification date. Further information to support responses was sought in Question 2.

Summary of responses — Question 2

Q2	Please explain your reasons for your choice, listing any positive and negative implications.
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This was a free format response so a variety of reasons were given to support the response provided in Question 1.

Reasons given from those **supporting** or **strongly supporting** the move included:

- ◆ Having the same results day as the rest of the UK makes a lot of sense
- ◆ This would give more time to catch up on the delayed start and to mitigate potential further disruption
- ◆ The delay should still leave enough time to address any subject changes at the beginning of term
- ◆ Reduce media attention as the same as the rest of the UK
- ◆ As many schools will be open on the 19 August, more support will be available for learners to discuss their options
- ◆ The later date will increase confidence that contingency arrangements are in place and that sufficient time is being allocated for marking
- ◆ Will support the move so long as it is not later than the rest of the UK as this would disadvantage Scottish candidates
- ◆ May help to alleviate stress and mental health concerns given the delays already incurred and potential further disruption

Reasons given from those **opposing** or **strongly opposing** the change in certification date included:

- ◆ Short time for colleges to deal with changing applications
- ◆ Results would not be known before the start of the Autumn term giving candidates less information to make course choices
- ◆ Advantage would be lost to Scottish students re securing university places if certification was the same as the Rest of the UK
- ◆ Staffing and timetabling issues if candidates changed their mind about subjects once results were received

- ◆ Delayed receipt of results would delay analysis of attainment and implementation of any associated attainment strategies
- ◆ Some learners may prefer to be at home to receive their results, particularly if they need time to reflect on their results and speak to family, helpline, etc first
- ◆ Additional pressure on teachers to provide support for senior pupils while managing workload with other year groups, particularly if it is the first day back for all pupils
- ◆ Additional pressure on SQA co-ordinators to review results and progress marking review requests
- ◆ It may be difficult to recruit markers, especially due to the earlier start of the 2021 summer holidays

Overall, respondents were receptive to the move in certification date but recognised that this move would create additional pressures for centres and candidates.

Summary of responses — Question 3

Q3	Please indicate the viability of the alternative models identified by selecting the most appropriate option below.
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Response	Option 1		Option 2	
	Start Date — 17 May 2021 End Date — 23 June 2021 Certification Date — 19 August 2021		Start Date — 13 May 2021 End Date — 23 June 2021 Certification Date — 19 August 2021	
	Volume	%	Volume	%
Not viable	0	0%	3	25%
Cannot easily be adopted	1	8%	4	33%
Could be adopted with some issues to be resolved	6	50%	2	17%
Could be adopted with minimal issues	3	25%	3	25%
Viable option	2	17%		0%
Total	12	100%	12	100%

Respondents were asked to assess the viability of two options by selecting the response that best indicates their position.

Of the 12 stakeholders that responded to the survey, three respondents were supportive of both options presented, whereas one was not supportive of either option. Two indicated challenges with both options.

Timetable consultation summary		
	Option 1	Option 2
Response	Start Date — 17 May 2021 End Date — 23 June 2021 Certification Date — 19 August 2021	Start Date — 13 May 2021 End Date — 23 June 2021 Certification Date — 19 August 2021
1	Cannot easily be adopted	Cannot easily be adopted
2	Viable option	Could be adopted with minimal issues
3	Could be adopted with minimal issues	Could be adopted with minimal issues
4	Could be adopted with minimal issues	Cannot easily be adopted
5	Could be adopted with some issues to be resolved	Could be adopted with some issues to be resolved
6	Could be adopted with some issues to be resolved	Not viable
7	Could be adopted with some issues to be resolved	Could be adopted with some issues to be resolved
8	Could be adopted with minimal issues	Could be adopted with minimal issues
9	Could be adopted with some issues to be resolved	Not viable
10	Could be adopted with some issues to be resolved	Not viable
11	Viable option	Cannot easily be adopted
12	Could be adopted with some issues to be resolved	Cannot easily be adopted

Option 1 was indicated as viable by two respondents with no stakeholders indicating that it was not viable.

Two respondents indicated that Option 2 was not viable, and no stakeholders indicated that this option was viable.

From the responses to this question, Option 1 was the preferred option, although most stakeholders indicated issues to be resolved should this option be progressed.

Summary of responses — Question 4

Q4	Please explain your reasons for your choice, listing any positive and negative implications.
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The **positive** reasons given were as follows:

- ◆ Increased learning and teaching time

- ◆ Delaying the start of the timetable but keeping the order of the exams the same provides continuity

The **negative** reasons given were as follows:

- ◆ Last day of exams too close to the end of term impacting on extra-curricular / suspended timetable activities normally undertaken in June
- ◆ Increased risk of coincident exams, particularly for centres that also offer A-Levels and GCSEs
- ◆ May have limited availability of markers in the holiday period
- ◆ Delay would make starting the 2021–22 timetable difficult in June
- ◆ Delay in certification would impact the start of the Autumn term
- ◆ May have a negative impact on candidates with Alternative Assessment Arrangements
- ◆ Reduction in June teaching time available for the 2021–22 cohort
- ◆ Not much time between end of exams and schools closing at end of term
- ◆ Disrupts the normal routine of secondary schools
- ◆ Some centres are scheduled to close on 18 June, before some of the exam dates proposed have concluded
- ◆ Availability of invigilators may be limited, especially if some exams cross into the holiday period
- ◆ Impact on the certification process
- ◆ May have an impact on the availability of markers
- ◆ Physical distancing could pose issues for the successful implementation of any exam model
- ◆ Reduced marking window potentially impacting on quality of marking and potentially putting more pressure on markers, many of whom are current teachers and are already under pressure with their existing workload

The volume of negative reasons compared with the small amount of positive reasons demonstrates the challenges facing centres if the timetable is delayed.

Summary of responses — Question 5

Q5	<p>Another alternative model is scheduling the timetable by level, so National 5 exams would be at the start of the timetable, giving more teaching and learning time to Higher and Advanced Higher learners. Please provide your thoughts on the viability of this approach.</p>
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The **positive** reasons given were as follows:

- ◆ This is the best approach presented as prioritising exams by level seems sensible
- ◆ This is a sensible approach as Higher and Advanced Higher are particularly vulnerable to disruptions in teaching

- ◆ Ideally if there could be an overlap between smaller National 5 and Higher and Advanced Higher subjects, this could shorten the timetable
- ◆ This model is supported in theory, but more thought is needed on the scheduling of exams to minimise coincidents

The **negative** reasons given were as follows:

- ◆ Finding exam accommodation and keeping the school quiet while teaching is continuing would be difficult
- ◆ It would be a challenge to have all but S4s in school while exams are taking place. Exam leave for all year groups at the same time is preferable
- ◆ This model has been adopted before and extends the exam window impacting on the introduction of the new timetable in June
- ◆ Candidates undertaking National 5s and Highers would be disadvantaged by this approach as they would miss out teaching for Highers while sitting National 5 exams
- ◆ This may be seen as treating S4 leavers less favourably than their more academic peers
- ◆ High probability that National 5 candidates would have exams overlapping or very close together, minimising revision time
- ◆ Higher number of coincident exams increases the risk of security breaches from an invigilation and managerial perspective
- ◆ National 5 learners have also experienced disruption to teaching so scheduling the National 5 exams first would be a further disadvantage to this group
- ◆ As this is the first experience of exams, National 5 learners require as much time as possible to prepare
- ◆ As all courses are supposed to be 160 hours, it would be unfair to reduce the hours for one level
- ◆ Reducing the teaching time for one level only gives the impression that this level of qualification is of less value
- ◆ This approach would create a two-tier system, negatively impacting the candidates that sit multi-level exams who would miss out on the teaching of Highers while sitting National 5s (many learners that fall into this category will only sit one or two Highers prior to leaving school)

Again, significantly more challenges than benefits were identified with this option. Some of the positive reasons were dependent on lowering the number of coincident exams.

Summary of responses — Question 6

Q6	Having evaluated the potential alternative models please indicate your preference by selecting one of the options below.
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Having considered the options presented, respondents were asked to state their preference. The responses were mixed:

Timetable preference		
Option	Volume	%
Use current published dates	4	33%
Delayed start of existing timetable	6	50%
Restructured with National 5s first	2	17%
Total	12	100%

While delaying the start of the timetable was the most popular option, only half of respondents supported this approach, with the other half divided between the other two options presented.

Also, as seen in responses to other questions in the survey, support for options are caveated, with all options presenting issues to be resolved.

Summary of responses — Question 7

Q7	Please provide further information to support your preference
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The reasons provided were consistent with responses to previous questions.

Reasons given for supporting the use of the **current published dates** tended to focus more on the reasons for not supporting a delayed start to the timetable:

- ◆ It would be more advisable for SQA to reduce the length of the exams and remove some elements of the course
- ◆ No advantage in delaying the timetable unless there is a substantial further loss of 'normal' in-school teaching and learning
- ◆ Both teachers and candidates up the intensity of work closer to exams and delaying the start of the timetable would in all probability simply delay this process likely negating any potential advantage of extra teaching/learning time
- ◆ For those candidates who work obsessively, the potential for burn out will increase with extra teaching/learning time
- ◆ All schools and candidates have had experience of distance teaching and learning, so there should be minimal disruption if it again becomes necessary
- ◆ Need to minimise the potential prolonging of learning loss into next session and allow the change of timetable in June
- ◆ Young people have suffered significantly during lockdown and the extension of exams right to the end of term will impact on transition
- ◆ There are concerns over the impact on future years
- ◆ The availability of appointees and markers to be able to carry out a successful certification process would be limited if the timetable was delayed
- ◆ SQA staff engagement and availability are a concern should the timetable be delayed
- ◆ While the three-week delay looks like it would provide more teaching and learning time, on a per subject basis, it is unlikely that the shift in dates would create much additional teaching time

- ◆ Moving the exam timetable would be highly disruptive and would not be consistent with the Scottish Government's expectation that the organisation of education in the next academic year should be as close to normal arrangements as possible

Reasons given for supporting the use of the **delayed timetable**:

- ◆ More time needed due to delayed start this session
- ◆ Model 1 is preferred as it gives extra time for teaching and learning but does not increase the coincident exam level
- ◆ Staff need time and support to ensure courses are adapted in light of any modifications
- ◆ Additional time is crucial to ensure pupils are prepared for their final exam and are given time to work on technique
- ◆ It provides a clear message, which should be understood by all, and provides the least change to current arrangements
- ◆ Weighing everything up, and being fully aware of the pressures on teaching staff and young people to 'catch up', delaying the start of the existing timetable is probably the best option
- ◆ Centres are able to manage the issues identified in delaying the timetable and would maybe offer young people and staff a bit of a reprieve from the feeling of rushing to get through everything by end of March/May
- ◆ This approach may enable prelims to be delayed, which would allow more time to plan further ahead
- ◆ This is the preference expressed by staff when 'speculating' as to what is ahead re exams

Reasons given for supporting the use of the **restructured timetable (National 5s first)**:

- ◆ This seems like the logical way to approach it based on our current situation and uncertainty around how the session will look
- ◆ It makes sense to delay the start of the exams to maximise teaching time at all three levels
- ◆ There is a marginal preference for the National 5 first option as it would give further teaching time to Higher and Advanced Higher which would be welcomed by pupils and teachers alike

The responses received are mixed and, taken with the responses for previous questions, do not provide overwhelming support for any of the suggested alternatives.

Summary of responses — Question 8

Q8	Do you think there are any potential equality impacts that should be considered in relation to the alternative models?
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This question aimed at understanding if there were any particular groups of learners that may be impacted by any of the options presented.

The responses received were varied:

- ◆ No impacts identified
- ◆ Pupils who have not been able to engage in the curriculum at home will be most adversely affected
- ◆ Those impacted by a lack of access to IT
- ◆ If pupils are presented at the correct level, then this should allow equality to be maintained as best as possible
- ◆ Some pupils who would start to work/volunteer/travel as soon as their exams had finished (those who are in their final year at school) would have less time to carry out these activities as the exam timetable is extended which may decrease their opportunity to start earning to save for future study or take up work or apprenticeships
- ◆ Restructuring the timetable to schedule National 5 exams first may leave National 5 candidates feeling they are being penalised and undervalued in relation to Higher and Advanced Higher candidates
- ◆ There may be a higher proportion of National 5 candidates than Higher and Advanced Higher candidates who feel disadvantaged by distance learning, so putting their exams first could exacerbate this inequality
- ◆ Concerns that learners will not be able to start their new timetables in June if the examination timetable delayed or extended and therefore will experience a break from learning and teaching of around 3 months
- ◆ Young people sitting a mixture of National 5 and Higher exams could miss out on the additional learning and teaching time for Higher and Advanced Higher
- ◆ If National 5 exams are too early, then it is likely that they will not have had the required teaching hours to complete the course and would therefore be at a disadvantage when sitting their exam
- ◆ If candidates who were sitting National 5 exams had their exams all at the start, there might be an equality impact
- ◆ Having National 5 exams before Higher and Advanced Higher creates a two-tier system
- ◆ Avoid doubling the possibility of pupils sitting different exams on the same day, which creates even more stress than necessary for young people
- ◆ Equality assessments will need to be a key feature of any timetable going forward for the next year
- ◆ Key considerations will need to be thought through regarding equipment that a learner has in the home in some cases, for example for Admin and IT courses
- ◆ Impacts will depend on any future COVID-19 disruption

- ◆ The equality assessments taking into account the course modifications will need to be factored in when the timetable is finalised
- ◆ Subjects with longer exams will be impacted more
- ◆ Pupils from deprived areas and those with protected characteristics should not be unfairly penalised by any system changes and, as such changes should be sufficiently transparent to instil confidence in teachers, pupils, parents, and employers
- ◆ Early publication of equality impact assessments will support improved dialogue with the profession and improve teachers' confidence in SQA processes

The volume of issues and considerations raised across all options presented indicate the challenges faced in making any proposed changes to the existing timetable.

Summary of responses — Question 9

Q9	Please provide any other suggested changes to the exam timetable you would like SQA to consider.
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This question invited alternative suggestions to be made by respondents that would be considered by SQA. This question was optional, and many respondents did not provide a response.

From those that provided a response to this question, there were key themes identified:

- ◆ Course modification
 - Shorten length of National 5 exams
 - Remove some course content from Higher and Advanced Higher
 - More significant modifications than those already being consulted on are required
 - Reduction in the length of some exams
 - More choice for candidates in exams
- ◆ An even later proposed start date of the Exam timetable
- ◆ Cancelling exams
 - Visibility of contingency plans should this be required
 - Approach to be taken should exams be cancelled
- ◆ Weekend exams
 - Would not be popular with all involved
 - May have practical issues re availability of centres, staff, etc
- ◆ Only school leavers to sit National 5 exams
- ◆ Scheduling particular exams where they will have minimal disruption
- ◆ Early sight of contingency plans to mitigate the issues experienced in 2020
- ◆ Union representation on the SQA Advisory Council to support improved and increased dialogue and communication

4.2 SQA's Advisory Council

The Advisory Council were not supportive of a later certification date. They could foresee significant issues for the start of the new term in August 2021, and like the Timetable Advisory Group, members highlighted that the earlier finish to the 2020–21 session, combined with a later certification date, would lead to loss of time for teaching and learning. They indicated that the limited extra learning and teaching time created by the proposals would be outweighed by the challenges of working towards Thursday 19 August as Results Day.

The Council requested that SQA explore other options to delaying the start of the timetable and certification date.

4.3 Young People

A discussion was held with representatives from Young Scot, the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children and Young People's Commissioner, to understand the views of young people.

They had no strong position on the later start to the timetable, but learners did have a range of views on the different scheduling of National 5 exams. We have committed to include representatives in the timetable advisory process in the future.

4.4 SQA Appointees

All appointees who undertake marking for National Qualifications were consulted on their willingness to participate in marking and procedural events should the delay to the timetable be implemented via a short survey comprising two questions:

Question 1

Please indicate below if you are willing to participate in marking/examination procedures if the conclusion of the marking/examination procedures is delayed by three weeks (this was a mandatory question offering options of **YES**, **MAYBE** and **NO**).

Question 2

Please provide any other further comments in relation to the question above (this was an optional free text answer).

In total, 6,912 appointees were issued with the survey link on Friday 14 August. The consultation closed on Monday 24 August. All responses were anonymous.

Response rate

Only **13%** of appointees responded to the survey.

Reponses	Volume	%
Received	872	13%
Outstanding	6040	87%
Total	6912	100%

Including those that did not respond, only **9%** of appointees consulted indicated that they supported the option of delaying the implementation of the 2021 Exam Timetable by three weeks.

Response	Volume	%
Yes	614	9%
Maybe	189	3%
No	69	1%
Did not respond	6040	87%
Total	6912	100%

Response to questions

Focussing on the responses received to Question 1, (**13%** of those contacted), only **50%** provided a reason for their response using the optional Question 2.

Response	Reason given				Total
	Yes		No		
	Volume	%	Volume	%	
Yes	230	53%	384	88%	614
Maybe	159	36%	30	7%	189
No	47	11%	22	5%	69
Total	436	50%	436	50%	872

The greatest proportion of those not providing a reason for their response, was those answering **YES** to Question 1.

Reasons given were reviewed and categorised as follows:

Category definitions	
Category	Definition
Limited availability	This related primarily to holidays and other commitments already booked or likely to arise that may prevent appointees from being able to participate in all or part of the marking/events period.
Marking period / events dates	Responses with this reason were dependent on having early sight of dates specific to their subject before confirming their availability and willingness to participate.
Multiple reasons	Appointees that provided more than one reason for their response.
None	This category is for those that did not answer Question 2.
Not supportive	This category is used for those that clearly expressed that they were not supportive of the option rather than being unavailable.

Other considerations	This captures responses where alternative suggestions or potential issues were specified such as: - Course modifications - Change in academic year from August to August - Use of remote working - Early start of 2021 summer holidays - Impact to allocation and take-up of FE places - Further disruption re COVID-19 - Reduction of marking time if done during holidays - Coursework timescales
Pay	Pay uplift requested (ie weekend rates) to compensate loss of holidays.
Prefer original timetable	Used when the response specifically specified that they would prefer the original timetable to be implemented.
Supportive	Where respondents specifically endorsed the approach.
Unavailable	This category indicates when appointees are not available to mark should the timetable be delayed.

Overview of responses received

Response	Volume	%
Yes	614	70%
Maybe	189	22%
No	69	8%
Total	872	100%

YES responses summary

Of those that responded, **70%** were supportive to delaying the 2021 Exam Timetable.

53% of those answering **YES** to Question 1 also answered Question 2, with some of the reasons **supporting** this approach given as:

- ◆ May be easier as centre release can be difficult during term time
- ◆ Essential for exams to take place in 2021
- ◆ Best outcome for students wanted
- ◆ Maximise time available

Additionally, some innovative solutions were suggested such as:

- ◆ Introduce a 'pre-exam grade' based on formative and summative assessment in centres
- ◆ Schedule higher uptake exams at start of the timetable
- ◆ Permanent change to August to August academic year to avoid disruption to future years

However, despite indicating their support in Question 1, some of the responses to Question 2 also identified challenges to this approach:

- ◆ Marking during holidays may encourage appointees to rush marking so potentially more sampling would be required
- ◆ Knock-on impact to procedures may make it tight for completing grade boundaries, etc, in time for certification
- ◆ Those involved in subjects typically held later in the Diet indicated that potentially most of their summer could be spent marking and undertaking procedural events which would not be desirable
- ◆ Later exams may impact on the introduction of the new timetable and the associated teaching for this
- ◆ Later exams may impact on the centre's ability to carry out other tasks (eg S1 transitions, school prize giving)

It is important to note that **131** of the **614 YES** responses (**21%**) were subject to caveats and, should these caveats not be met, then they may not be available to mark. These caveats included:

- ◆ Restrictions on dates available (many specified cut-off dates that they would not mark or take part in procedural events beyond, which ranged from the end of June to the end of July)
- ◆ Potential childcare issues
- ◆ May be more difficult to be released from centres due to new timetables starting
- ◆ Dependent on payments being increased to cover working during the holidays
- ◆ Notice of dates required by subject needed as soon as possible so that availability can be confirmed
- ◆ Remote working would be essential to ensure attendance

A summary of the reasons provided by those that submitted a **YES** response:

YES responses		
Category	Volume	%
Limited availability	24	4%
Marking period / events dates	34	6%
Multiple reasons	13	2%
None	384	63%
Other considerations	24	4%
Pay	4	1%
Prefer original timetable	2	0%
Supportive	129	21%
Total	614	100%

MAYBE responses summary

Of those that responded, **22%** could be supportive to delaying the 2021 Exam Timetable.

36% of those answering **MAYBE** to Question 1 also answered Question 2 with some of the reasons given as:

- ◆ Limited availability (holidays booked, childcare, etc)
- ◆ Dependent on dates of subject
- ◆ Need for a break after a challenging year
- ◆ Earlier commencement of 2021 summer holidays
- ◆ Impact on 2021–22 Diet
- ◆ No desire to work during the summer holidays
- ◆ 3 weeks is too long, 1 or 2 weeks may be more doable
- ◆ Increase in pay if marking during holidays
- ◆ Course may not be completed (ie limitations in teaching practical subjects) so students may not be 'exam ready'

A summary of the reasons provided by those that submitted a **MAYBE** response:

MAYBE responses		
Category	Volume	%
Limited availability	93	49%
Marking period / events dates	23	12%
Multiple reasons	19	10%
None	30	16%
Not supportive	1	1%
Other considerations	15	8%
Pay	5	3%
Prefer original timetable	2	1%
Supportive	1	1%
Total	189	100%

NO responses summary

Of those that responded, **8%** were not supportive of delaying the 2021 Exam Timetable.

11% of those answering **NO** to Question 1 also answered Question 2 with some of the reasons given as:

- ◆ Not available (planned retirement, maternity leave, holidays booked, other commitments)
- ◆ No desire to work during the summer holidays
- ◆ Pay too low to consider marking during summer holidays
- ◆ Need for a break after a difficult year
- ◆ Dependent on timing of subject

- ◆ Childcare
- ◆ No change required; existing timeline preferred

A summary of the reasons provided by those that submitted a **NO** response:

NO responses		
Category	Volume	%
Limited availability	6	9%
Multiple reasons	5	7%
None	22	32%
Not supportive	19	28%
Pay	2	3%
Unavailable	15	22%
Total	69	100%

Respondents using holidays to support their response

One of the main reasons given for limiting availability was holidays. Many markers are planning to go abroad and/or have had their 2020 holiday moved to 2021 so their availability to mark is restricted. However, many indicated that should there be further travel restrictions in 2021, they may be available. The following table gives an indication of the volume of markers that may be available:

Holidays as a response		
Response	Volume	%
Yes	63	33%
Maybe	107	56%
No	20	11%
Total	190	100%

Note that these figures do not include respondents that had no desire to work during the summer holidays or indicated that they needed a break.

Response from principal assessors (PAs)

While the responses received were anonymous, some respondents did specify subjects, and some did identify as PAs. It was interesting to note that all respondents identifying as PAs did not support marking into the summer holidays, citing the difficulty of recruiting markers as well as the knock-on impact to procedural events as key reasons to support this view.

5 Conclusions

While there would appear to be positive support to delaying the start of the examination timetable, closer review of the comments highlights a number of significant challenges associated with the proposals. Stakeholders in both the Timetable Advisory Group and the Advisory Council, along with feedback from appointees, suggest that delaying the timetable presents a risk to the safe and secure delivery of certification.

In summary, an assessment of the responses indicates there is no clear and compelling support for a later timetable and certification date, and there is a risk that markers would be unwilling to mark during summer holidays.

For these reasons, SQA suggested proceeding with the published timetable and certification dates of Monday 26 April to Thursday 3 June with Results Day on Tuesday 10 August 2021. Following the Deputy First Minister's announcement that 2021 National 5 exams are to be cancelled, the exam timetable for Highers and Advanced Highers will start on Thursday 13 May and finish on Friday 4 June 2021, with Results Day on Tuesday 10 August 2021.