International approaches to the assessment of writing in the age of AI: Considerations for Scotland's externally assessed National Courses

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Contents

1 Introduction

This paper explores approaches taken to address the implications of artificial intelligence (AI), including generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), in the assessment of writing in the rest of the UK (RoUK) and internationally. This paper is published alongside:

- Approaches and considerations for the assessment of writing: A review of literature from 2013–2026 (Mroczkowski, 2026)
- Evaluation of the changes to English writing assessment (Hill, 2026)
- A linked summary document (Qualifications Scotland, 2026)

These papers provide important parallel considerations through a survey of academic literature relating to the assessment of writing, and a review of the impact of our own initial changes to assessment of the National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher portfolios of writing, which is an important non-exam assessment component of our English courses.

1.1 Context and challenges

AI, including GenAI, is rapidly reshaping educational practice as well as daily life and work, but there have been relatively few checks and balances on their integration into education systems (UNESCO, 2023). Since 2022 and the release of ChatGPT, such has been the speed of development that policy and guidance is essentially following behind AI tools rather than leading them. There are no agreed international approaches to policy in relation to AI generally or education specifically. In fact, the opposite is the case, with significantly divergent approaches in the UK, EU and USA (Holmes, 2025, 9–17).

The use of AI is closely interwoven with both assessment instruments and the surrounding assessment controls. At time of writing, no Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) jurisdiction permits the use of AI in exams. However, some, including Qualifications Scotland, allow limited use in coursework, often subject to extensive guidance and controls (OECD, 2026, 115). Assessment is a particularly sensitive domain: AI-generated text and artefacts can undermine assessment reliability if they are submitted as work intended to evidence learners' own capabilities. They undermine validity when assessment instruments no longer effectively measure the content or constructs they were designed for.

Concerns about authenticating learner work are not new: Qualifications Scotland has always prioritised clarity about the limitations of assistance for learners, whether from teachers,

parents, tutors or, more recently, from AI tools. We provide extensive guidance across a range of publications:

- Our conditions of assessment documentation provides clear information about assessment controls, including reasonable assistance (SQA, 2023).
- In relation to AI specifically, we have also published an updated stance on GenAI and detailed exemplification (SQA, 2025a; 2025b).
- Authentication guidance for educators and centres is available (SQA, 2025c).

However, with an eye to the potential impact of AI, we identified a need to review our approach to portfolio writing through ongoing dialogue with educators and centres about authentication. In response, we introduced a requirement for a supervised first draft of portfolio writing across National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher from 2024–25 onwards. We aimed to:

- Build in educator supervision at a point where some educator oversight and guidance might naturally occur. This is intended to support learners in developing their original pieces of work over time, and to manage educator workload.
- Provide an opportunity for educators to establish a natural baseline for comparison with the final product, which could support them during final authentication procedures.

The revised approach has been the subject of recent evaluation, published alongside this paper (Hill, 2026).

Looked at in the round, a central tension is apparent: AI tools are becoming embedded in everyday educational and societal practice, yet assessment systems must continue to differentiate between supported learning and independently demonstrated attainment. This involves both managing malpractice and adapting assessment to meet the needs of learners and educators in an increasingly AI-enabled society.

The comparatively low-supervision nature of coursework assignments makes them particularly vulnerable to AI-related malpractice, a consideration which has led to debate about the future of coursework in some jurisdictions. At the same time, the value of continuing to use non-exam assessment is widely recognised, with a recent OECD report highlighting the value of assessed extended writing in assessing creativity, and analytical and critical thinking (OECD, 2026, 88). All jurisdictions studied include some use of extended writing assessment, although the nature and extent vary significantly. As such, a review of approaches across a range of jurisdictions can offer a wide range of perspectives on this complex issue.

1.2 Potential solutions: Key features of effective assessments in the age of AI

Current research has highlighted that adopting revised approaches to assessment may be key to maintaining validity, reliability and relevance in assessment in an increasingly AI-enabled world (OECD, 2025). This paper is published alongside a detailed literature review which highlights a number of proposed approaches to effective assessment for the age of AI, focusing on authorial voice and scenario-based assessment (Mroczkowski, 2026). In addition, Holmes, and Hodges and Kirschner have put forward a range of approaches, framing them not simply as a question of designing AI 'in' or 'out', but as a means of fundamentally supporting effective learning and assessment (OECD, 2025; Hodges and Kirschner, 2023, 197–199; Holmes, 2025, 28–29).

These studies progress the dialogue around AI in assessment beyond the question of whether or not AI use should be permitted. Instead, the focus is on changing approaches; developing assessment which is fit for purpose in the age of AI by using approaches which assess the skills, knowledge and understanding that learners (and wider society) need. Some aspects may provide an opportunity for permitted AI use, but the focus of assessment is designed to measure human achievement, including critical reflection on the applications of AI. This paper explores several of the assessment approaches outlined in the existing evidence (OECD, 2025; Hodges and Kirschner, 2023, 197–199; Holmes, 2025, 28–29). These are referred to as 'AI-appropriate' approaches throughout and include:

1. **'Process over product' approaches.** These approaches award marks for the development of writing rather than solely for the finished final output. In some cases, this may result in more assessments (though these are lower stakes) or a continuous approach.
2. **Reflective components.** For example, a requirement to include a personal reflection on the work undertaken.
1. **Critical and analytical approaches.** These approaches might involve the application of knowledge and writing skills in a new context, or the comparison of a shared theme across multiple settings. In some cases, they may even include critical analysis of how AI outputs have impacted upon the project. An example of this is the International Baccalaureate's 'Theory of Knowledge' component, for which AI-specific resources have been created to promote critical thinking.
3. **Personalisation**, either to the learner or the context. Learner-specific personalisation arises where the learner is required to determine and develop a piece of writing at an individual level. Context-specific personalisation arises where the awarding body either specifies the use of localised 'real-life' contexts or permits educators to personalise tasks.

4. **Linking of components**. This occurs where an assessment scheme links two assessment instruments or components together, for example a requirement for an oral presentation related to written work. This may provide multiple domains in which learners can demonstrate attainment while also acting indirectly as a form of authentication: a learner whose written work is not their own original creation may subsequently struggle to bring together an effective oral presentation.
5. **Group work and peer review.** Learners may work together to create initial ideas. In some (but not all) cases, the collaboration may extend to the final piece of work submitted and/or presented.
6. **Application of assessment-taking controls**. Qualifications Scotland's modification of the portfolio component is an example of this, with learners now being required to create a draft under supervision in class time. Time, volume and resource controls may accompany this, for example providing only unannotated texts for a timed final write-up, which must not exceed a specified word count.
7. **Authentication.** This includes the use of authentication declarations which include AI considerations, whether signed by the learner or educator or both, as well as internal and external approaches to verification of learner work.

Section 2 explores these approaches in depth from the perspective of assessment of extended writing, particularly where non-exam assessment approaches are used. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the extent to which these approaches feature across international jurisdictions.

2 International approaches to assessment in the age of AI

The following discussion provides key information about education, assessment and AI policies, followed by an overview of the approach to the assessment of extended writing linked to the 'AI-appropriate' approaches outlined above. It includes the following jurisdictions:

RoUK comparators

- England
- Wales
- Northern Ireland

International comparators

- British Columbia
- New Zealand

- Norway
- Singapore

Although the countries in the UK continue to take a devolved approach to education, we are nonetheless each other's first natural comparator, socially, politically and educationally. Changes to curriculum and assessment in one UK nation often prompt comparison with its neighbours' approaches in the first instance.

Wales is moving through assessment reforms and uses modularised qualifications. Its redesigned curriculum features a de-centralised approach, which, as in Scotland, is intended to promote educator agency in curriculum design and development (Evans, 2023). Northern Ireland has until recently also made use of both modular and linear approaches to qualifications, though recent announcements suggest a more linear approach in future (Department of Education, 2026). England is also undertaking major reforms of curriculum and qualifications (Francis, 2025). However, the direction chosen emphasises the retention of exams, in part due to the perceived threat to validity posed by AI. As such, the nations of the UK provide a wealth of comparisons and contrasts in their approach to AI in assessment.

The international comparators have been selected because they combine a pro-AI approach to policy with features of curriculum and/or assessment which are relevant to either Scotland's current or reformed qualifications.

2.1 England

2.1.1 Approach to AI

Qualifications in England are regulated by Ofqual. Ofqual have produced a policy paper on approaches to regulating AI in the qualifications sector in England, listing five underpinning key objectives. These have been developed to align with the UK Government's white paper: A pro-innovation approach to AI regulation.

The five key objectives are:

- ensuring fairness for learners
- maintaining validity of qualifications
- protecting security
- maintaining public confidence
- enabling innovation

2.1.2 System overview

In England, GCSEs are usually taken at the end of two years of key stage 4 study (ages 14–16). They are England's closest parallel to National 4 and National 5 qualifications. These are followed by a range of course options in upper senior phase. England's two-year A-levels are broadly analogous to Higher and Advanced Higher.

A range of awarding bodies provide GCSE and A-level qualifications in England, with AQA having the highest uptake for these courses. These are written to meet content set by the Department for Education, and assessment objectives and general conditions of recognition set by Ofqual. In AQA courses, subject-specific considerations relating to AI are addressed within course specifications. Detailed guidance on non-exam assessment controls, and on the verification and standardisation of internal assessments is also provided separately.

AQA, along with most other UK awarding bodies offering GCSE and A-level, are also members of the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). JCQ works with its members to ensure a consistent approach to the administration of assessments and also provides detailed guidance on AI (JCQ, 2025). This underpins much of the approach taken in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Where internal assessment is used in England, Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny (CASS) are set nationally by Ofqual to provide regulation. CASS applies to a wide range of qualifications, including GCSEs and A-levels where internal assessment is a component (Ofqual 2020, 7–8).

2.1.3 Approach to the assessment of writing

GCSE

The English system does not integrate a portfolio of writing or assess the ability to develop writing over time through non-exam assessment at all at GCSE level. English Language and English Literature are two discrete courses at GCSE (Ofqual, 2015a, 2015b). Both are key measures within England's accountability systems, Progress 8 and Attainment 8, and have a very high uptake (DfE, 2024). However, Ofqual requirements mean that GCSE grades are determined entirely through exams. The only component which is internally assessed is spoken language (Ofqual, 2015c). These assessments are mandatory, but outcomes are separately reported, subject to significant standardisation and moderation, and do not contribute to the final grade. As such, there is no opportunity for learners to be assessed on writing developed over a period of time in early upper secondary qualifications.

A-level

There is some use of non-exam assessment in writing at A-level. Three pathways are available, discrete English Language and English Literature A-levels, or a combined course. Ofqual's subject conditions and requirements permit up to 20% non-exam assessment in each of these courses. The subject guidance for English Language, English Literature and combined English Language and Literature all require an extended approach, with one or more responses produced by learners as their own independent work to a total volume of 2500–3500 words (Ofqual, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). Awarding bodies take a range of approaches to designing non-exam writing assessments. Appendix 3 provides a summary of these. Key features of assessment tasks include the following:

- Use of commentaries and/or reflective processes — these are integrated into the assessment activity for most specifications. This is particularly prominent in English Language and combined courses.
- Cambridge OCR links components to a degree, asking learners to produce an academic poster drawing on their written assignment.
- Personalisation — within set parameters, learners undertaking comparative work are consistently encouraged to choose texts based on broad parameters rather than pre-set lists. Some specifications specifically indicate that learners must choose at least one of the texts themselves.
- Group work — this is limited; AQA's English Literature specification indicates that learners may study one text in common, but the other must be free choice and individually selected.
- The use of AI is not allowed in exams, which aligns with JCQ guidance. However, appropriate use, guided by educators and appropriately referenced, can be permitted in coursework (see also Appendix 2).
- Authentication processes involve both learner and educator certification.

Personalisation of tasks and an emphasis on process, critical and analytical skills can effectively mitigate AI misuse, as AI use does not provide advantage in these settings, and the assessment tasks themselves are designed to be stimulating, personalised and reflective.

Extended Project Qualification

The value of detailed study and extensive writing development over time is also recognised in England through the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) (Ofqual, 2023). This is a cross-disciplinary project worth approximately half an A-level and has 120 guided learning hours. It is

targeted to learners who intend to progress to university and appears to be highly valued by higher education institutions (Gill, 2022). The AQA specification states that:

> ‘Students are required, with appropriate supervision, to:
>
> - choose an area of interest
> - draft a title and aims of the project for formal approval by the centre
> - plan, research and carry out the project
> - deliver a presentation to a non-specialist audience
> - provide evidence of all stages of project development and production for assessment.’
>
> (AQA, 2020, 3)

A core ‘taught’ component focuses on the development of skills required to complete the project and takes approximately 30–40 hours. The topic is agreed internally, led by a school coordinator following discussion between the learner and their appointed supervisor. The project proposal, presentation record, candidate record and production log all contribute to assessment evidence. Cambridge OCR, Pearson, AQA and Eduqas all provide specifications (Cambridge OCR, 2015; Pearson, 2010; AQA, 2020; Eduqas, 2024a).

A high level of independent working is required for EPQ projects, and it is notable that some awarding bodies have taken the step of providing specific advice related to AI. Eduqas provides this advice in learner-friendly language with a simple summary of issues, from the reliability of AI tools to their permitted use (Eduqas, 2024b). It highlights practitioners’ role in guiding AI use and reminds learners that AI use is not completely prohibited in coursework settings. Where the use of AI tools is allowed, learners must reference them clearly and comply with Eduqas and JCQ regulations.

Marking takes a holistic approach, using bands across assessment outcomes. This is internal but has required standardisation processes. Work is then moderated externally.

2.1.4 Analysis

Significant variation in approach is apparent in the assessment of writing in upper secondary in England. While assessment in GCSE is overwhelmingly external and primarily assessed in high-control exam environments, A-level learners have greater opportunity to demonstrate attainment through extended writing developed over time. At A-level, coursework components contribute a relatively small proportion of the mark, at 20%. However, the assignments themselves do exhibit some of the features noted above, notably personalisation, critical and comparative analysis, reflective work and commentaries, and strong authentication features.

Reflecting a pattern of increasing independence as learners move towards post-school destinations, the EPQ offers the greatest degree of freedom, with the presence of most of the 'AI-appropriate' assessment features noted in section 1. The EPQ is entirely project-based with no exam. As such, personalisation, process orientation, reflection and linking of components are deeply embedded into the course assessment process. See also appendix 1.

2.2 Northern Ireland

2.2.1 Approach to AI

Northern Ireland's Department for the Economy published its AI Strategic Direction in late 2025 (Department for the Economy, 2025). This strategy focuses on three key areas: ethics, investment and regulation. The place of AI in the education system is the subject of ongoing discussion in Northern Ireland (Holmes, 2025). AI is beginning to have a wider impact upon assessment within teaching and learning in Northern Ireland: an external provider, Nurture, has been for over 1100 primary schools in Northern Ireland (Nurture, 2024; Holmes, 2023, 38). The Education Authority have also committed to a rollout of digital tools with some initial success (Education Authority, 2025).

2.2.2 System overview

Northern Ireland also offers GCSE qualifications. However, these are different in approach to those offered in England, with reforms resulting in an increased focus on skills development and life skills from 2013 onwards (CCEA, 2025b). There is an open market for GCSEs in Northern Ireland, with a range of awarding bodies offering GCSEs (NIDirect, 2024).

In Northern Ireland, curriculum and assessment are led by a single agency, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). CCEA specifications are the focus of discussions below. The regulatory arm of CCEA, CEA Regulation, has an independent function within the CCEA and is a member of JCQ (CCEA, 2025a). For some subjects, Department of Education policies have a notable impact on qualifications. For example, schools must offer English Language GCSEs in which marks for the assessment of speaking and listening contribute to the overall grade. This is a different approach to that used in England and Wales, and as a result, schools in Northern Ireland may only offer CCEA GCSE English Language (CCEA, 2025c).

Wide-ranging reforms have recently been proposed in Northern Ireland (Department of Education Northern Ireland 2026). These may in time impact upon the wider use of AI within

Northern Irish education, including within assessment. The proposed shift to exam-focused GCSEs may reflect AI considerations to some degree: CCEA will be responsible for most assessment and therefore also responsible for addressing most considerations around AI. However, the proposals to modularise A-levels and shift the balance of content and assessment within upper secondary qualifications may prompt a shift towards internal assessment, leading to a shift in responsibility towards centres for managing AI considerations.

2.2.3 Approach to the assessment of writing

Northern Ireland has discrete specifications for GCSE English Language and English Literature (CCEA, 2022a; 2022b). 20% of English Literature and 40% of English Language is internally assessed. However, learners complete tasks with tightly-supervised controls in place for both subjects. Although they conduct research over time to contribute to their final submissions, they have to produce the final draft in a single, highly controlled event, where only unannotated excerpts of stimulus texts are provided. Work is also externally moderated.

In GCSE English Language, the internal marks are divided between a speaking and listening assessment (20% of the total mark) and a controlled internal assessment of written and spoken language (20%). Both internal assessments are externally moderated (CCEA, 2022, 6). The two tasks are:

1. The Study of Spoken Language — learners complete one written response that enables them to investigate the characteristics of, and influences on, two pieces of spoken language.
2. The Study of Written Language — learners complete one written response that enables them to demonstrate knowledge of characters, themes or genre in a literary text or texts.

Although assessment is internal, CCEA assesses the level of control as high. The task themes are set by CCEA and revised annually, but centres are encouraged to adapt tasks to the needs of their learners (CCEA, 2022, 9). CCEA recognises that there are limited controls over planning and research undertaken in learners' own time. Across both GCSEs, the following control features are apparent:

- Supervised final write-up.
- Mandatory secure storage of final work, including between writing sessions.
- Time controls: work must be completed in a specified timescale, spread over sessions if required.
- Teachers must authenticate the work.

- Teachers may give feedback during planning and preparation only. They can also advise on how the assessment will be marked.
- Group work is permitted, but only in the preparatory stages.
- When producing the piece for final assessment, learners only have access to unannotated copies of the stimulus text. Dictionaries, notes and internet access are not permitted.
- Internal and external moderation.

A-level

At A-level, CCEA provides specifications for English Literature only, with no course available for English Language at time of writing. Learners taking CCEA GCE A-level English Literature are required to produce a 2500-word piece of coursework. This is internally assessed and constitutes 20% of the mark (CCEA, 2018). Learners engage in a detailed study of two novels, one of which must be a 21st-century novel. Centres are encouraged to allow learners to select their own novels, with teacher guidance and support. As in England, a comparative approach is used, which is fundamentally evaluative in nature, and learners are assessed across a range of assessment objectives.

2.2.4 Analysis

At GCSE, while extended writing is assessed internally outside of a formal exam setting in Northern Ireland, the final assessed work is produced in exam-like conditions, with a high degree of supervision and control. Greater freedom is apparent at A-level, with increased use of personalisation and evaluation. However, approaches using personalisation and evaluation are not as marked in their development and extent as they are in some other jurisdictions, though planned reforms in Northern Ireland may result in further changes. As in England, authentication, verification and moderation processes remain a significant part of the assessment process.

2.3 Wales

2.3.1 Approach to AI

The Welsh Government is actively exploring the potential of AI across the public sector. It has published a national AI strategy, and has established an Office for AI (Welsh Government, 2025a). A Strategic AI Advisory Group was established in mid-2025 (Welsh Government, 2025b).

A recent review by Welsh education inspectorate Estyn highlighted a range of effective uses of AI in learning and teaching, noting some use in classroom assessment activities, particularly formative assessment. However, it noted inconsistencies in approach, along with significant caution about the use in high-stakes assessment, linked to the positions of awarding bodies and regulators (Estyn, 2025, 18–20). The report noted several positive practice examples by both educators and learners. These tended to focus on formative, feedback and administrative tasks, suggesting that as elsewhere, the key applications of AI are currently most effective in these areas, rather than in high-stakes and final critical assessment judgements.

2.3.2 System overview

WJEC is the main provider of school-focused qualifications in Wales. Other awarding bodies can also offer GCSE and A-level courses, but these must be designed to meet Qualifications Wales's approval criteria (Qualifications Wales, 2026a). The discussion below focuses on WJEC specifications.

Wales has recently undertaken significant reforms of 14–16 qualifications (Qualifications Wales, 2026b). The rollout of the revised qualifications is ongoing at the time of writing. The reforms have been driven by wider changes, including a revised approach to the curriculum. The revised Curriculum for Wales includes learners aged 14–16, with modified principles to account for subject choices in upper secondary education (Welsh Government, 2026). These changes have several parallels with Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, making the reforms of particular interest in a Scottish context. Wales's reform programme has resulted in wide-ranging changes to qualifications and assessment. Many of these considerations align closely with reform priorities in Scotland, notably a shift towards increased non-exam assessment, modular courses, and digitisation.

2.3.3 Approach to the assessment of writing

GCSE

WJEC specifications are available for combined English Language and English Literature at GCSE (WJEC, 2025). The GCSE courses are part of the reformed qualifications offer. As such, teaching only began in 2025, and the first learners have not yet been assessed. The courses are available as double or single awards with 40% assessed internally. Assessments across the units include: written essay, extended response, creative non-fiction writing response, group and paired discussions, and oral presentation. These are often linked to each other. For example, the oral presentation requirement in unit 2 links to a written task, while group

discussion in unit 3 informs a creative writing response. All non-exam assessments are internally marked and externally moderated, with centres required to retain and/or submit evidence for this purpose.

AS and A-level

A-level courses are also modular, with English Language, English Literature and Combined options available. Current specifications have been in use since 2015.

AS and A-level (unit 5) English Language includes a 2500–3500-word language research project, worth 20% of the total mark (WJEC, 2015a). Learners complete this component over an extended period, and so associated controls are subsequently limited. However, the specification guidance indicates that centres should monitor progress in a number of ways, including:

- careful record-keeping of the progress of learners' work, particularly the submission of drafts
- careful consideration of whether the work submitted is characteristic of the learner's ability and attainment
- keeping the work that learners have submitted secure in a securely locked cabinet or cupboard

Task setting features a high degree of personalisation and learners are required to complete the investigation largely independently. WJEC provides four potential themes for learners to select from. Marking is internal, with detailed grids provided to support assessment judgements across the full range of assessment objectives. In addition, WJEC selects a sample of learner work for moderation.

AS and A-level English Literature written exams include open-book options in some units. However, texts must be unannotated copies, provided by the centre (WJEC, 2015b). 20% of the course mark is drawn from an internally-assessed assignment.

A combined English Language and Literature course is also available at AS and A-level (WJEC, 2015c). Like the literature course, exams are a mixture of open- and closed-book conditions. The assignment is internally marked and is worth 20% of the marks.

Across AS and A-level specifications, as at GCSE, internally-marked components use a holistic marking grid. Marks are then internally standardised, with external moderation following. Clear guidance is given, including the provision of exemplar materials to support marking. Both learners and educators sign an authenticity declaration.

Extended Project Qualification

As in England, an EPQ is available (WJEC, 2023). The specification page specifically highlights AI use guidance. This aligns to JCQ guidance and reminds learners that AI use is not permitted in exams, but that non-exam use can be acceptable provided AI tools are appropriately used, referenced, and acknowledged when signing the authentication declaration. As in England, 120 guided learning hours are suggested, some of which is allocated to skills development. The assessment objectives focus on the project design, resource choice, project development, as well as review and communication, embedding process and personalisation into the project.

2.3.4 Analysis

The approach used in Wales makes much greater use of internal assessment at a comparatively early stage compared with GCSEs in England and Northern Ireland. Assessment controls vary from unit to unit, but include:

- personalisation of tasks within parameters set by WJEC
- parameters and stimuli are provided by WJEC but changed regularly to prevent malpractice
- requirements for paired discussions and so on to be recorded
- requirements for learners and teachers to upload assessment evidence to a dedicated system, IAMIS, for quality assurance and moderation
- time and volume controls that apply to most tasks
- linking of components, for example, the linking of a group discussion and an extended creative writing response
- specific requirements for the teacher to inform learners about malpractice risks and consequences at the start of the course
- (WJEC, 2025, 37)

Strikingly, the newly launched GCSE qualifications exhibit many of the AI-appropriate features identified in section 1.2, with extensive use of process, reflection, critical evaluation, linked components, including oral presentations, and group work. The relatively recent nature of reforms may be a factor — new qualifications developed since the expansion of AI use have a strong opportunity to account for AI in their design. The EPQ specification has also recently been revised, with the current course launching from 2023. In contrast, the A-level courses, which are older, make much less use of internal assessment, although an assignment is an important component and does feature a notable degree of personalisation.

2.4 Norway[1]

2.4.1 Approach to AI

Norway has a future-focused national AI strategy, which may result in further changes to the approach to learning and assessment following a planned skills review linked to the strategy. Norway is a world leader in exploring the applications of AI in education settings, with Scottish higher education institutions recently joining the Norwegian-based AI Learn partnership (University of Edinburgh, 2026). Broad guidance on the use of AI in education, updated in 2025, shares many features with Scotland's approach, including an emphasis on the teacher as a leader of appropriate and ethical AI use in the classroom, as well as their key role in authentication (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2025*).

2.4.2 System overview

Norway has two school leaving certificates (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2023). The 'vitnemål for grunnskolen' is a certificate of primary and lower secondary education issued at the end of compulsory education (approximately age 16). Many learners go on to complete the upper secondary leaving certification, vitnemål fra videregående opplæring'. Learners are graded for each subject on a 6-point scale. Those who do not meet the requirements for the diploma programmes may receive a certificate of competence (kompetansebevis).

Norway makes extensive use of internal assessment, with some compulsory exams. However, this sits alongside internal assessment which is continuous in nature, with feedback, learner reflection and formative approaches key to the process (Eurydice, 2026). The use of external assessment is very limited, with only randomly selected learners within each cohort required to sit an external exam in upper secondary (Eurydice, 2026). Norwegian is one of the few subjects with a mandatory exam, as well as internal components (Sonans, n.d.*).

2.4.3 Approach to the assessment of writing

External exam

Norway has modified assessment controls in exams as a response to AI considerations. Norwegian, as the first language, is one of the few subjects with a compulsory exam (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2024a*). In other subjects, Norway makes only limited use of external

[1] Some of the sources referenced in the Norway section are not available in English. Browser-embedded tools have been used to translate the sources for the purpose of analysis for this paper. These sources are indicated with an asterisk (*).

exam assessment, selecting a sample of learners (often around 20%) to take the exam, which appears to act primarily as a comparator for internal assessment judgements. Learners who are selected are notified only 48 hours before the exam, which may be written, oral, or oral-practical. A written exam may last up to 5 hours and oral assessments may last up to 30 minutes. Learners are only notified of the topic of an oral assessment 24 hours in advance.

The period between notification and exam had served as a preparatory period for learners, who would prepare notes they can use during the exam. Some of Scotland's National Courses also use a similar approach, in which learners complete coursework under high-control conditions but are permitted to bring in prepared notes on a resource sheet.

However, Norway consulted on changes to the use of open-book exams in 2023–24 due to concerns about AI-generated content (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2024b*), and implemented changes from spring 2025. The consultation process prompted considered debate, providing an opportunity to make a balanced decision which considered the purpose of exam assessment and reflected stakeholder inputs. Some stakeholders advised against a total ban on digital resources and a complete move to closed-book conditions for a variety of reasons, including:

- an impact on the validity of the assessment, particularly where extended writing is required
- a potential impact on teaching methods as teachers revert to non-digital approaches in the classroom in order to prepare learners for the exam
- too great a division between the assessment approaches to coursework and exam impacting the efficacy of the overall process in terms of validity, comparability and reliability (Ulvestad, 2025*)

Learners continue to be given just one or two days' notice to sit an exam. However, assessment controls have changed to discontinue the use of prepared notes. This is not a complete shift to closed-book conditions — source extracts are allowed, but candidates must be provided with 'clean' unannotated copies by the centre. The changes to both digital and traditional approaches appear to have been initially accepted by teaching professionals in Norway, following some debate during consultation about how far changes should go (OECD, 2026, 86).

Internal assessment

Internal assessment in Norwegian from early (grade 10) to late (VG3) upper secondary focuses on formative assessment, focusing on developing knowledge, skills and competences over time. The curriculum* specifies that learners demonstrate and build their competence continuously through reading, writing, and oral activities, such as analysing and interpreting a wide range of texts, exploring their contexts, and reflecting on how meaning is shaped

(Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2024a). Study content includes a wide range of literary texts across a range of time periods and social contexts. Learners must demonstrate a clear understanding of both forms of Norwegian, Bokmål and Nynorsk, and the comparative linguistic positions of Norwegian and other Scandinavian languages. These focal points are explored in increasing depth throughout senior phase.

Curriculum guidance* for assessment in upper secondary (VG3) encourages assessment of a range of skills, competences, core themes and interdisciplinary considerations across reading, writing, speaking and listening (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). This includes process-focused writing, with learners receiving feedback and participating in peer and teacher discussions to improve their work. Self-assessment and reflection are also actively encouraged, and teachers use a range of tasks to gather evidence of learners' developing abilities.

Norway's primarily internal approach to assessment openly recognises the challenges posed by AI, particularly in relation to the assessment of writing. The Norwegian Directorate for Education advice states: '*[AI] is changing the framework for training and assessment. In particular, assessment of written assignments has been highlighted as challenging. A varied assessment practice is an important basis for meeting this challenge.*' (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2025*). The guidance explores in some depth not only how to prevent AI misuse, but how and where to integrate it as an effective support tool. The guidance identifies a range of mitigations to AI misuse in various situations and provides advice on ensuring assessment integrity, many of which focus on assessment design as a solution.

This guidance* on assessment approaches is provided across curricular levels. It supports teachers in balancing the need to learn about (and with) AI and ensuring that learners' work is genuinely demonstrates their attainment. It also makes suggestions about assessment instruments, several of which involve modifying the underpinning approach. For example, suggestions include introducing:

- contexts based on unknown cases or the learners' own experiences
- questions which require answers that interpret, nuance or require self-reflection
- reasonable assistance designed to undermine the need to use AI (for example, learners can work together in groups to solve problems, discuss ideas, or create projects that are combined with tasks to be solved individually)
- use of oral verification (for example, learners can explain orally or in writing how they arrived at a claim or argument and what sources they have used)

Advice on assessment design also recommends that assessments:

- consist of several different subtasks that combine different task types, such as:
- open or rich questions versus more specific, or closed, questions
- long-answer questions versus short-answer questions
- be carried out within shorter or longer periods of time
- combine different assignment formats, such as written, oral, practical and/or using film clips or recordings (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2025*)

2.4.4 Analysis

Approaches which may discourage AI misuse appear to be well embedded in Norwegian assessment. The approach to assessment features almost all of the AI-appropriate approaches identified in section 1. The application of such approaches is closely interwoven with the use of internal assessment in the Norwegian system, reflecting that educators know their learners best, and so are best placed to design effective assessment and support formative approaches which are appropriate for an AI-enabled world, as well as to authenticate learner work. The breadth of the assessment approach may aid educators in making effective assessment judgements by producing a secure evidence base gathered over time rather than in a single event.

2.5 New Zealand

2.5.1 Approach to AI

New Zealand's strategy for artificial intelligence was launched in July 2025 (New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2025). This has an economic focus, but also recognises the potential for impact across public and private sectors, including education (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2025, 2, 5). A Public Service AI Framework sits alongside this, and has the stated aim of ensuring that public services model best practice in AI use, and enable and contribute to the wider community and economy (New Zealand Government, 2026).

While some commentators have raised concerns that educational considerations are not sufficiently prominent in government policy (EdTechNZ, 2025), reforms to the New Zealand education system hope to make effective use of AI. Trials of AI marking by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) have reached an advanced stage (NZQA, 2025). The education

minister has also set out plans to fully integrate the study of AI into senior phase, with the development of a specific programme of study currently under consideration (The Post, 2025).

At present, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority provides detailed information about assessment controls and conditions for teachers and schools (NZQA, 2026a). AI use is expressly prohibited in external assessments. However, National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) guidance does recognise that GenAI may be used for initial information gathering, brainstorming and planning in situations where recording of these initial processes does not form part of the assessment itself and where AI use is appropriately acknowledged. In general, practice principles require that any use of GenAI tools must:

- comply with the requirements of individual assessment standards, with educators taking a key role
- ensure that learners are not over-scaffolded or guided to the point that their work is not their own

2.5.2 System overview

The NCEA was introduced between 2002 and 2004 and is issued by the NZQA (NZQA, 2026b). It has three levels: 1, 2 and 3, and 80 credits are required to achieve an NCEA at each level. There is considerable flexibility in how learners can do this, with many work-based courses and the New Zealand driving test potentially contributing to NCEA credits. 20 of the 80 credits are received for literacy and numeracy co-requisites, which has also recently been reformed (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2026).

The NCEA was intended to reduce the reliance on external, end-point exams, which were a hallmark of the preceding system. The NCEA sought to assess learners against set assessment standards, with assessment taking place internally and throughout the year as well as year-end external exams (OECD 2026, 51–52).

Initially popular, the programme is currently under review. Educator workload has been a significant concern, as has the potential for over-assessment. There is also some evidence of learners disengaging from external assessment having accrued sufficient credit through internal means (OECD, 2026, 52). The New Zealand Ministry of Education has announced plans to replace the current NCEA with a new model (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2025). The reformed diploma system will retain three levels:

- NCEA Level 1 will no longer be available from 2028, and a new Foundational Award will be introduced.

- The New Zealand Certificate of Education (for Year 12) will be introduced in 2029, replacing NCEA Level 2.
- The New Zealand Advanced Certificate of Education (for Year 13) will be introduced in 2030, replacing NCEA Level 3. (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2025, 12)

Specific concerns about AI malpractice have already led to the removal of reports as an assessment instrument at level 1 and their replacement with exam or portfolio. English and Social Studies are the two subjects affected. However, NZQA do not appear to be concerned about the potential impact on validity arising from the discontinuation of this assessment instrument, stating that the change is not intended to impact the competences and learning outcomes. The fact that the change applies only to the lowest tier of NCEA study may be a factor.

2.5.3 Approach to the assessment of writing

The structural focus on credit accumulation through the meeting of assessment standards means that New Zealand's course content looks somewhat different from the examples seen in the UK. There are some core co-requisite requirements, including for the study of English (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2024b). Many opportunities exist across NCEA levels for learners to accrue English credit through extended writing portfolios linked to individual assessment standards. Standard 91101 (Produce a selection of crafted and controlled writing) at NCEA level 2 is one such example. Learners are required to produce at least two pieces of writing, which demonstrate effective language use, but also evidence the ability to manage and develop ideas and structures (NZQA, 2019). Marking is internal and exhibits a holistic approach.

Assessment controls vary according to the assessment standard in question. For standard 91101, an approach which focuses on developing writing over time is encouraged. Clear guidance on acceptable AI use in this context is integrated into advice on assessment conditions for this standard (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2024c). In addition, at subject level, educators are encouraged to provide guidance to learners, including on appropriate use of AI, and are required to:

- closely supervise the writing process to ensure authenticity
- check that learners do not copy from another person or source without appropriate acknowledgement
- limit feedback to general suggestions that reference the achievement criteria in the standard

- ensure that learners do not receive guidance, scaffolding, instruction, assistance, or assessment conditions outside what is specified as permissible in these conditions (NCEA, 2026, 3–4)

As such, both learners and teachers have a key role to play in authenticating learners' work. Teachers are encouraged to include the following activities in their teaching and learning as a specific support to appropriate AI use:

- teacher guidance on the nature and extent of acceptable GenAI use, if any
- assessor observations and conversations
- meeting with the learner at set milestones or checkpoints
- [review] the learner's record of progress, such as photographic entries or any GenAI prompts used (NCEA, 2026, 2)

2.5.4 Analysis

New Zealand's upper secondary assessment processes are currently very complex and will soon undergo significant reform. Assessment of writing currently exhibits an approach which focuses on process and development over time, with portfolios a feature in the course examined above. As with other jurisdictions that make extensive use of internal assessment, teachers have a central role as assessors and authenticators as well as leaders of learning. This is particularly marked around AI use and misuse in New Zealand, with guidance which positions teachers as the front line for providing support to learners (NCEA, 2026).

2.6 Singapore

2.6.1 Approach to AI

Singapore has a notably forward-looking approach in terms of the use of AI and technology, with specific AI policies embedded within its SmartNation initiative (Government of Singapore, 2023; 2026). The National AI Strategy (NAIS), published in 2023, sees AI as being central to economic and social development (NAIS, 2023). Singapore was an early adopter of AI, with the first strategy published in 2019. By the time of the 2023 revision, AI was already well-established in education, used for a range of purposes including adaptive learning systems and regulatory development (NAIS, 2023, 8). Partnership between the private sector and public education is specifically noted as a means to raise AI security capabilities (NAIS, 2023, 58).

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has developed a detailed plan for integrating AI into education as part of Singapore's 'Transforming Education through Technology' (EdTech) Masterplan 2030 (Singapore MoE, 2026a). This focuses on:

1. learning with and about AI
2. effective educator use of AI to support learning
3. guardrails to prevent misuse and unethical behaviour
4. an age-appropriate approach, with light and supervised use of AI for younger learners
5. in later stages, ethical use as an enhancement to their own capabilities
6. education settings that enhance the teaching of skills to support learners to thrive in an AI world

The MoE approach focuses on using AI as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, the process of gaining skills and knowledge. An education-specific approach, the AI in Education (AIEd) ethical framework (Singapore MoE, 2026), builds on principles set out in Singapore's Model AI Governance Framework (Personal Data Protection Commission Singapore, 2023)

In relation to assessment, AIEd highlights two key considerations:

- There is a clear emphasis on learner mastery, rather than AI substitution for human skills.
- Learners are taught the importance of academic integrity and taking responsibility for their own work.

The Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB) has also developed a range of policies and tools to support effective and ethical use of AI. Exams remain the main instrument of assessment in Singapore, and these are governed by detailed regulations set by the SEAB (SEAB, 2026a).

2.6.2 System overview

Singapore continues to make extensive use of end-point external exams, although there are signs that this exam-driven approach to curriculum and assessment may be beginning to change, with significant reforms underway. Current Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate Education (GCE) O-, A- and N-level courses are being discontinued, and a Cambridge-Singapore Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) will be offered from 2027 onwards (Wong, Kwek and Tan, 2020; Singapore MoE, 2026; SEAB, 2026b).

Changes to the current curriculum from 2023 onwards exhibit features of ‘Big Ideas’ curricula, and a competence-based approach reminiscent to Scotland’s ‘Curriculum for [2]Excellence’ in some aspects.. Curricular revisions from 2023 focused on competences, with ‘Big Ideas’ principles increasingly apparent at both cross curricular and subject.(MoE 2023).

2.6.3 Approach to the assessment of writing

Singapore uses exams to assess all aspects of first languages in upper secondary subject settings under the current system. Therefore, there is no coursework component in O- N- or A-level courses. However, extended writing, assessed internally, appears in Singapore’s project work component (SEAB, 2025). Like EPQ qualifications in parts of the UK, this is taken alongside A-level study rather than within it. However, in Singapore, the project is a mandatory part of junior college study, usually taken in the first year of the course. Learners work collectively in assigned groups of four or five on a project that is focused on addressing a problem, or taps into an opportunity identified in a real-world context. The assessment framework includes both oral and written components, comprising:

- a written project summary of approximately 1200 words (30% of mark, completed as a group)
- a personal reflection (20% of mark, completed individually)
- an oral presentation of 25–30 minutes — each learner contributes at least 5 minutes of the presentation, and groups are required to respond to questions for 20–25 minutes afterwards (50% of mark divided between 20% for group component and 30% for individual contribution) (SEAB, 2025)

Learners are expected to apply their knowledge and skills to generate, analyse, evaluate, and support ideas that consider real-world needs, and present findings clearly and coherently in both written and oral forms. Courses are graded pass-fail, and assessment criteria are evaluated using rubrics. Marking is undertaken internally, with internal standardisation and external moderation following (SEAB, 2025, 7–9).

2.6.4 Analysis

Singapore has a highly contrasting approach in upper secondary assessment: while exams dominate at subject level, the project work component takes an innovative approach to internal

[2] ‘Big Ideas’ curricula employ a technical framework which organises subject-specific and cross curricular knowledge around key concepts. This is often conceptualised as a ‘know, do, understand’ approach.

assessment which includes extended writing. As seen with Wales's GCSE reforms, recent revisions to project work courses show particular strengths in AI-appropriate approaches, featuring high levels of individual and contextual personalisation, process and reflection-driven approaches, multiple assessment instruments (including a presentation as well as written work), and the use of group work. As with EPQs used in England and Wales, the project work component is clearly intended to develop independent thinking and effective approaches to problem solving which are transferable to the workplace and further or higher education. Both EPQs and Singapore's project component also sit alongside subject systems which currently primarily assess through exams, making the project a key means of demonstrating development over time and independent working.

2.7 British Columbia

British Columbia is included for the following reasons which are relevant to Scotland's future qualifications:

- use of internal, modularised assessment
- extensive use of internal assessment
- extensive use of portfolios

2.7.1 Approach to AI

A 2023 Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) policy scan highlighted a range of concerns about the comparative lack of policy and governance of AI in Canada's schools, noting that only three provinces had adopted AI-specific guidance: Quebec, British Columbia and Ontario (CTF, 2023). This situation has evolved rapidly in response to ongoing change in recent years with a clear increase in AI-specific guidance. The Canadian Government has published guidance on the responsible use of AI in government (Government of Canada, 2026). The British Columbia Government has published a policy for public service employees, as well as a framework for using AI tools in K-12 schools (Government of British Columbia, 2025; 2026). The framework offers extensive guidance to school boards on incorporating AI into classrooms, addressing ethical, accessibility, and data security concerns as well as potential approaches to integration. The document also recognises the need to mitigate challenges for marginalised groups, and the opportunities and challenges of assistive technology.

2.7.2 System overview

In British Columbia, the 'Dogwood Diploma' is completed across grades 10–12. Learners must accrue 80 credits to graduate, at least 16 of which must be at level 12. Level 12 credits must include at least one language arts course (Government of British Columbia, 2024). Assessment is overwhelmingly internal with considerable flexibility around assessment delivery. The exceptions to this are statewide graduation assessments. These are mandatory for grade 10 literacy and numeracy and grade 12 literacy, with further requirements for learners studying through the medium of French.

British Columbia's approach takes careful account of performance in international measures. In 2012, a detailed analysis commissioned by the British Columbia Government explored the connections between British Columbia's English assessments and the OECD combined reading scale (Cartwright, 2012). Earlier research had focused on the link between Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) and PISA outcomes (Cartwright et al., 2003). A 2008 study also explored the intersections between 2006 outcomes from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and British Columbia's 2008 grade 4 FSA assessments, in effect using performance data from international measures to provide feedback on domestic practices. The study noted several shared features, concluding that the two tests measured similar reading-related skills (Government of British Columbia, 2008).

2.7.3 Approach to assessment of writing

Learners are required to complete 12 credits of English study across grades 10–12, including either English Studies or English First Peoples at grade 12 to meet the English Language Arts component of the Dogwood Diploma (Government of British Columbia, n.d.). A range of additional optional courses are also available for learners. Across grades 10–12, courses consistently emphasise an iterative approach to writing, requiring work to be developed and refined over time. Certain features are common to all grade 10–12 courses. Of particular interest are the references to:

1. **Curricular competency — Writing and design processes**: 'There are various writing and/or design processes depending on context, and these may include determining audience and purpose, generating or gathering ideas, free-writing, making notes, drafting, revising and/or editing, and selecting appropriate format and layout.' (British Columbia Curriculum, English Studies, n.d.)
2. **Curricular content — Writing Processes:** 'There are various writing processes depending on context. These may include determining audience and purpose, generating or gathering

ideas, free-writing, making notes, drafting, revising, and/or editing. Writers often have very personalized processes when writing. Writing is an iterative process.' (British Columbia Curriculum, English Studies, n.d.)

These are adapted in some cases, for example in the optional grade 12 New Media course, in which writing and design processes are defined as: '… prewriting, planning, drafting, storyboarding; revising, editing, and publishing; using sketch, shade, and colour; and selecting appropriate format and layout' (British Columbia Curriculum, n.d.). The fundamental principle of learners developing work over time as an integral part of the assessment is well embedded across the courses.

This approach aligns well with British Columbia's predominantly internal approach to assessment overall. A formative approach is embedded across the curriculum at all levels. The guidance on classroom assessment highlights four key approaches which have been in use for over 30 years (Government of British Columbia, 2020):

- Performance Assessment (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1994a)
- Portfolio Assessment (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1994b)
- Student Centred Conferences (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1994c)
- Student Self-Assessment (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1994d)

This is particularly insightful in terms of exploring the approach to writing portfolios. In British Columbia, portfolio approaches are in widespread use throughout K-12, and assessment through portfolio is seen as an ongoing, evidence-based process that supports learning over time rather than a single judgement. Selection of work samples is varied and aligned to curriculum and content requirements. Portfolios are expected to include:

- a selection of learner work
- guidelines for item selection
- evaluation criteria
- evidence of learner reflection

(British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1994b,1)

2.7.4 Analysis

Although the specifics of upper secondary assessment processes in assessing writing are devolved to centres and educators, close examination of curricular content, competences and underpinning assessment guidance reveals a system that makes extensive use of portfolio

writing in assessment. Several aspects of the approach to assessment align with the AI appropriate approaches identified in 1.2 above, suggesting that the system in British Columbia was already naturally well-positioned to adapt to AI challenges to a degree when the technology emerged. In particular, the following features are apparent:

- The approach to writing is formative and iterative, and is integrated across the curriculum.
- Learner reflection is embedded into the writing process.
- Educators have a key role in ensuring assessment controls, across setting, delivering and marking, including authenticating that the learners' work is their own.
- The use of formative assessment through evolving portfolios is a long-standing practice that is well embedded across the curriculum. This may be vital to the effective integration of this approach, despite the significant demands it places on educators as assessors.

3 Findings

Across this review, a number of recurring themes have emerged. These include:

- AI is widely framed as a tool to enhance the process of gaining skills and knowledge, rather than a replacement for human skills and knowledge. It is here to stay, and will increasingly impact assessment approaches.
- Recognition of the benefits and challenges relating to ethical use of AI in education is widespread, although a wide variety of policy approaches are apparent.
- International approaches increasingly seek to address both AI integration and the avoidance of malpractice through the approach to assessment design.
- Educator judgement, guidance and oversight are core to effective assessment practices (particularly in internal assessment settings) and authentication.
- Educators and awarding bodies have an ethics-focused and cautious approach to the use of AI and other technological tools.
- There is increasing recognition of the need to integrate AI learning into qualifications and assessment, with a particular focus on the role of critical and analytical skills.

3.1 Assessment approaches for the age of AI

Reflection upon the use of the AI-appropriate approaches outlined in section 1.2 in other jurisdictions provides some helpful insights into how and where the assessment of writing is evolving in the 'age of AI' internationally.

It is not always clear whether or not changes to assessment design and control features are a direct response to AI considerations. Some of the examples set out above specifically reference AI considerations as a driver for change. Such cases are often focused to a degree on malpractice considerations. However, change can also be a reflection of changing wider societal needs around assessment. For example, recent OECD research pinpoints assessment approaches as key to preparing young people for lives of fulfilment and purpose (OECD, 2025). These changes may also encompass AI indirectly through the increasing impact of AI tools on our everyday lives. Nonetheless, assessment is adapting at pace internationally to meet the needs of 21st century society. As a result, the AI-appropriate approaches identified may feature increasingly in assessment in the future, both as a specific response to AI and within wider resultant societal changes.

The following discussion examines the international evidence against the identified AI-appropriate approaches. No system adopts all approaches comprehensively in the assessment of writing, and it is important to remember that a variety of factors other than AI influence assessment design. However, distinct patterns emerge when each approach is considered individually.

1. ‘Process over product’ approaches

A process-focused approach has the potential to remove the risk of AI misuse through focusing on the development of a piece of work rather than the final product alone, thereby focusing on individual development over time rather than the meeting of a single goal. Process-focused approaches are most evident in jurisdictions with strong traditions of internal and continuous assessment. Norway and British Columbia stand out as systems in which writing is explicitly developed over time, with drafting, feedback and revision forming part of the assessment evidence. This approach is also strongly present in project-based qualifications such as the EPQ (England and Wales) and Singapore’s Project Work. New Zealand similarly embeds process within portfolio-based standards. By contrast, it is largely absent in RoUK GCSEs including in Northern Ireland, where even internal assessments are completed under high-control conditions that prioritise the final product. A-level coursework across RoUK settings represents a partial case: while the process is necessary for completion, it is not typically assessed in its own right.

2. Reflective components

Reflective elements are widely used. Like process-focused approaches, reflection can support an approach which focuses on individual skills, promoting improvement. AI tools are often less

successful in replicating processes and reflections than they are in generating a ‘product’ to meet set assessment requirements. Reflective approaches are a consistent feature of project-based qualifications (EPQ, Singapore’s Project Work), where structured reflection forms a formal part of assessment. The International Baccalaureate ‘Theory of Knowledge’ component has produced some innovative examples of work which actively reflects on the implications of AI use within the assessment process, providing a controlled environment for AI exploration. Reflection is also embedded in assessment in Norway and British Columbia, often as part of ongoing formative practice rather than as a discrete assessed component. In A-level courses in England and Wales, reflective commentaries are frequently required, particularly in English Language specifications. However, reflective writing is largely absent in GCSE-level qualifications in Northern Ireland and only partially present in Wales’s reformed GCSEs. Systems relying entirely on exams, such as England’s GCSE, and Singapore’s O- N- and A-levels, appear to make no use of reflective processes in assessment activities.

3. Critical and analytical approaches

Critical and analytical approaches are most consistently embedded across all jurisdictions. All systems require learners to apply knowledge and interpret texts critically, regardless of assessment structure. As such, critical and analytical writing appears to be a stable feature of assessment design rather than a specific response to AI. This is logical given the nature of the content and tasks involved in assessing writing skills in first language contexts. Approaches in some settings also encourage critical and analytical approaches specifically targeted to the use of AI *within* assessment. In Norway, and in the International Baccalaureate ‘Theory of Knowledge’ examples discussed above, critical and analytical approaches to controlled AI use are clearly apparent. There is widespread recognition of the importance of critical and analytical approaches to learning about (and with) AI: the recent Francis review in England highlighted a need to respond to the rise of AI with effective training in appropriate use, digital skills, media literacy and critical thinking (Francis, 2025, 10).

4. Personalisation

Personalisation is common in internally-assessed and coursework-based components. Personalisation can be an effective counterbalance to the generic nature of AI outputs. Furthermore, the use of personalised approaches can reduce learner inclination towards inappropriate AI use by focusing on approaches which are both relevant and stimulating for the learner. Personalisation is strongly embedded in project-based qualifications and in systems such as Norway, British Columbia and New Zealand, where learners frequently select topics,

texts or contexts. Wales's reformed GCSEs also show a clear move towards both learner-level and centre-level personalisation. In contrast, personalisation is more limited in GCSEs in Northern Ireland and England, where task design is tightly prescribed. At A-level across the UK, personalisation in English is generally limited by defined parameters, often focusing on text selection or thematic approach, rather than being a fully open choice. However, EPQs in England and Wales, and Singapore's project component offer fully personalised opportunities which encompass most aspects of project design, within a framework including educator and centre support and clear specification requirements.

5. Linking of components

The linking of written work to other assessment instruments and tasks, particularly oral presentation, is a distinctive feature of several systems. This approach can have the benefit of allowing the learner to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding in depth, and across a range of settings. However, it can also support authentication of learner work: a learner whose submitted written work is in fact not their own is likely to struggle in an oral presentation or viva-voce style assessment. Oral assessment has long formed part of the assessment process in a range of settings, up to and including the assessment of research degrees, and is a well-established way to both explore deeper learning and authenticate that the work is the learner's own.

Linked components are strongly present in Wales's new GCSEs and EPQ qualifications, and in Singapore's Project Work. In these cases, written, oral and discussion components are explicitly connected. Norway also demonstrates this through its integration of oral and written assessment practices and through recommendations for oral validation of written work. In contrast, linking is largely absent in exam-only systems, as well as traditional subject-based coursework in England and Northern Ireland, where components are often assessed separately.

6. Group work and peer review

Collaborative approaches are used in some jurisdictions but are not universal. They are most fully embedded in project-based qualifications, particularly Singapore's Project Work. They are also evident in Norway and, to a lesser extent, Wales, where group discussion forms part of assessment for some courses. In British Columbia, collaboration and peer discussion are part of broader classroom practice, though it is not always clear how these are formally assessed. By contrast, group work is largely absent from RoUK subject qualification specifications, except in preparatory phases, perhaps reflecting concerns around authenticity and individual attribution.

7. Application of assessment-taking controls

The use of explicit assessment controls is widespread across all jurisdictions, though the form these take varies significantly. RoUK systems (England and Northern Ireland in particular) rely heavily on high control conditions, including supervised writing, time limits and restricted resources. This is particularly marked in early upper secondary qualifications. AI malpractice concerns were highlighted as a specific consideration when recommending the continued use of exam assessment in a recent review of curriculum and assessment in England (Francis, 2025, 136). Although the importance of learning with and about AI was recognised throughout the wider review, non-exam assessment was viewed as more vulnerable to AI malpractice (Francis, 2025, 10, 136). Subsequently, the high-control environment offered by exams means that they may well continue to be the principal assessment instrument in England. New Zealand combines process-based assessment with structured checkpoints and supervision, while Norway has also strengthened controls in exams by removing the use of prepared notes. Even in systems that emphasise design-based approaches to AI malpractice prevention, assessment controls remain an important complementary measure.

8. Authentication

Authentication processes are universally present, though their form varies. RoUK jurisdictions rely on formal mechanisms, including teacher and learner declarations, internal standardisation and external moderation. In contrast, jurisdictions with strong internal assessment traditions (Norway, British Columbia, New Zealand) place greater emphasis on teacher-led authentication through ongoing observation, interaction and knowledge of the learner's work over time, although formal processes remain in place. Across all systems, authentication is a central concern, reflecting the shared challenge of ensuring that assessed work represents the learner's own attainment.

3.2 Emerging patterns

While recent changes to qualifications in international jurisdictions frequently reflect the AI-appropriate approaches outlined above, the picture that has emerged is far more complex than it might first appear. Rather than applying ever-strengthening assessment controls in an attempt to 'prevent' AI misuse, many jurisdictions are evolving their approach to assessment itself. This goes beyond simply preventing malpractice, and the approaches we have identified throughout this study are not solely a response to concerns about AI. Rather, they reflect a changing world within which AI is a factor, but not the sole issue determining assessment approaches in many cases. There are of course situations in which specific responses are required: in Norway and

New Zealand, for example, we have seen specific changes to assessment instruments and conditions which directly result from AI malpractice concerns. However, these sit alongside a backdrop of wider educational reforms which are underway across many jurisdictions as educational systems seek to ensure that education, qualifications and assessment continue be effective, valid and reliable for rapidly changing societal needs. AI is a significant contributing factor within those needs, and may lead to specific adaptations in some cases, but it is not the sole driver of change.

Ethical considerations are at the core of approaches across education systems and encompass not only use of AI by learners, but also wider systemic applications. In Singapore, for example, age-appropriate approaches and ethical guardrails are key to the national strategy for integrating AI into education, a position reflected across the jurisdictions studied. We also recognise that there are additional ethical dimensions to the wider use of AI in education and qualifications which cannot be covered in depth within this paper (Webb, Luckin and Ecoff, 2023).

A number of wider themes are also apparent, including:

1. Diverging approaches

Where specific measures are implemented to address AI considerations, a divergence is apparent internationally. Some jurisdictions have opted for the implementation of tighter assessment controls to prevent AI misuse, often involving increased use of exams. Others have adopted assessment approaches which seek to 'design out' the need and/or risk of AI use.

Both approaches depend on making changes to assessment controls, assessment instruments, or a combination of the two. No approach is completely foolproof. An assessment design led approach is most apparent in settings which make extensive use of internal and continuous assessment approaches. However, specific responses can still be required: even in Norway and New Zealand, both of which make extensive use of internal assessment, there are examples of situations in which assessment controls or instruments have been modified as a direct result of AI-related concerns. At the same time, media reports highlight ever-evolving mechanisms to circumvent assessment controls. The growth of wearable tech in particular means that even the tightest levels of supervision and control coupled with use of unseen materials might not be able to prevent AI misuse (Tech Times, 2026). In cases where wearable tech, and even earpieces, are virtually undetectable, even the use of high-control test-taking settings, such as exams, can no longer guarantee avoidance of AI-related risk, or indeed wider technological malpractice (ASRG, 2025).

2. Increasing learner agency with age

Amongst jurisdictions continuing to favour a highly externalised approach to assessment, there is a pattern of increasing learner agency in AI use, linking to increased prominence of the AI-appropriate approaches highlighted in 1.2.

England, Northern Ireland and Singapore all make extensive use of exams to assess writing in early upper secondary. England and Singapore do not use any form of coursework to assess extended development of writing in early upper secondary. Northern Ireland's GCSE English courses include internal assessment of extended writing, but use a high-control setting to produce final drafts. As such, the approach to the production of final assessed work takes place in exam-style conditions. Scotland's approach of supervising a first draft within a four-hour time frame, but otherwise leaving centres considerable freedom as to how and when they do so, offers considerable flexibility.

In general, RoUK jurisdictions permit greater freedom in post-16 school qualifications. All RoUK settings contain a coursework component which assesses extended writing at A-level. This coincides with an increase in the use of AI-appropriate assessment approaches such as personalisation and reflection. Critical and analytical approaches are apparent, but are also essential to the task itself to begin with.

Both learner agency and AI-appropriate assessment approaches peak in project-based qualifications designed to be taken alongside subject-specific courses. These are not assessments of writing skills but have extended writing as a core component. Here, learner agency, personalisation, reflection, process-focused assessment, group and collaborative work, and linking of components, such as oral presentations drawing on written submissions, appear to be universal. Such courses are targeted towards learners approaching higher education, and are well respected by higher education institutions as a preparation for study.

3. Reforms responding to an AI-enabled world

Whether by design, or in response to wider societal change, there is a correlation between reformed or revised specifications and increasing use of AI-appropriate assessment approaches.

This is particularly evident in Wales, where the GCSE English internal components show significant strengths mapped against AI-appropriate approaches. Older A-level specifications are both more conservative in their use of coursework and in the use of these approaches. Many of the interdisciplinary project qualifications also have recently created or updated

specifications. There is a clear pattern of revisions which support effective assessment in an AI-enabled world. Many of these changes are recent, however, and it is not yet clear how changes will impact wider education systems and educator and learner workload, particularly where there is movement from a primarily external approach to qualifications assessment towards greater use of internal assessment.

4. Internal assessment as a support to effective assessment practice in the age of AI

Norway, British Columbia and New Zealand all make extensive use of internal assessment approaches. The educator's role in leading learning, designing assessment, and assessing and authenticating learners' work provides a well-integrated approach to ensuring effective assessments and reliable authentication.

However, there is an important caveat: Norway and British Columbia in particular have formative, internal approaches to the assessment of writing which have been deeply embedded across curriculum and assessment from an early age. In British Columbia, the use of portfolios, feedback, learner peer discussion and reflection is embedded from the earliest stages of education and has been embedded in the wider system for decades. Effective implementation of such approaches in new setting may depend on a variety of factors, including alignment of curriculum and qualifications, effective supports for educators in delivering and assessing within revised approaches and effective workload management.

5. Educators' role in supporting AI use, assessment and authentication

A striking feature across jurisdictions is the role played by educators. Their role in the assessment process has always been significant, but AI considerations are now a factor in how it is framed. Not only are educators the first line of defence against malpractice, but they also have an increasingly key role in safeguarding and guiding appropriate and ethical AI use.

In addition, authentication is an increasingly key aspect of educators' role. In many RoUK settings, teachers and learners co-sign authentication declarations. Internal and external moderation processes are significant and form a workload consideration for educators and centres. In internal assessment settings, educators are expected to be authenticators. The structural features of internal approaches, which give educators a leading role in assessment design and delivery, also positions them well to authenticate work through naturally occurring evidence and observation. Where extended writing coursework assignments and portfolios are used, educators are best placed to authenticate learner work and support effective assessment

as they know their learners best. This reflects the findings of recent OECD research, in which a matrix for categorising assessment tasks notes a similar relationship between assessment design and authentication (OECD, 2026, 54).

The evidence above shows educators having a key role in assessment design internationally as well. This may be designing an internal assessment themselves, or it may involve adapting an assessment within awarding body parameters. Where extended writing coursework assignments and portfolios are used, international evidence supports that practitioners are best placed to authenticate learner work. Educators know their learners best, and so are well-placed not only to authenticate their work, but to support effective assessment suited to their context. In Scotland, the decision to include a supervised first draft of writing portfolios aligns with this, supporting educators by providing an initial point of comparison for later authentication, and creating an environment in which effective classroom discussion can support drafting and avoid the need for inappropriate AI use.

3.3 Concluding remarks

In short, changes to assessment, and to education systems as a whole, are happening in response to changing societal needs. These include, but are not exclusively a result of, AI-related considerations. Changes to curricular approaches and systemic reforms are a common feature of many jurisdictions explored in this paper, reflecting a move towards frameworks which balance skills, knowledge and understanding, and assess competences as well as product. All jurisdictions recognise the value of non-exam assessment of extended writing and assess it in some way. The extent of this varies considerably: from embedded internal, portfolio-focused approaches across ages and stages such as that seen in British Columbia, through to highly adapted approaches such as those seen in cross- curricular project programmes in England and Singapore.

Close analysis of changing and developing approaches to assessment of extended writing not only highlights that non-exam approaches to writing assessment can be retained in the age of AI, but that retention is vital due to its ability to assess a complex synthesis of human skills. Critical and analytical thinking is central to effective assessment now and in future, and non-exam assessment of extended writing is a vitally important element, whether as an assessment of writing skill in first languages, or as part of an interdisciplinary project designed to prepare learners for future work or study.

AI tools are developing at pace, but critical and analytical human approaches to AI outputs will continue to be vital to ensure that they are fair, equitable, accurate and reliable. The rapidly

evolving changes to assessment approaches discussed above are ‘AI-appropriate’ but are not solely a direct response to AI’s threat to validity and reliability through malpractice. Instead, they are reflective of the evolving needs of society, within which the recent growth of AI is a significant influence. AI is consistently framed in international systems as an enhancement to human knowledge, rather than a replacement for it, and as a result systems are shifting their approaches to ensure that assessment is effective for future needs.

Clear guidance on the use of AI is a vital support to learners, educators and centres. At present, we provide a range of guidance and support, including:

- Generative AI in assessment guidance (SQA 2025a)
- Practitioner information and exemplification (SQA 2025c)
- Guidance on authenticating learner work, including AI-specific considerations (SQA 2025b)

In combination with the requirement to supervise a first draft of writing portfolios at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, we have laid the groundwork for effective support for our externally marked portfolios in an AI-enabled world. Ongoing review and development of support resources will continue to be vital to our approach.

Appendix 1: ‘AI-appropriate’ assessment approaches

Approach/ Jurisdiction	Process orientation	Reflective writing	Critical and analytical approaches	Personalisation	Linking of components	Groupwork or collaboration	In-assessment controls	Authentication
England: GCSE	No coursework components							
England: A-level	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	In some cases — Cambridge OCR requires a poster linked to written work	Limited to shared set texts for some courses	Limited, clear guidance on AI use	• Teacher and learner declaration • Teacher observation • Internal and external moderation
England: EPQ	Yes — extensive	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes — oral presentation on written topic	Allowed but not mandatory	Limited, clear guidance on AI use	• Teacher and learner declaration • Teacher observation • Internal and external moderation
Wales: GCSE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes — by learner and by centre in some cases	Yes — written reflections, oral components and group discussions	Yes — group discussions, paired discussions	Time and volume in focus	• Teacher and learner declaration • Teacher observation • Internal and external moderation

Approach/ Jurisdiction	Process orientation	Reflective writing	Critical and analytical approaches	Personalisation	Linking of components	Groupwork or collaboration	In-assessment controls	Authentication
Wales: A-level	Process is not assessed, but value in developing planning and drafting skills is recognised		Yes	Yes	No	No	Limited, clear guidance on AI use	• Teacher and learner declaration • Teacher observation • Internal and external moderation
Wales: EPQ	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Allowed, but not mandatory	Limited, clear guidance on AI use	• Teacher and learner declaration • Teacher observation • Internal and external moderation
Northern Ireland: GCSE	No	No	Yes	Some — centre led	No	No, other than shared study of texts	• High control of final write-up: time, volume, and supervision • Resource access restricted to unannotated text passages	• Teacher and learner declaration • Teacher observation • Internal and external moderation

Approach/ Jurisdiction	Process orientation	Reflective writing	Critical and analytical approaches	Personalisation	Linking of components	Groupwork or collaboration	In-assessment controls	Authentication
Northern Ireland: A-level	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Limited – coursework completed over time, subject to volume controls	• Teacher and learner declaration • Teacher observation • Internal and external moderation
Northern Ireland: EPQ	N/A							
Norway (across upper secondary)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Heavily teacher led	Teacher led
New Zealand (for example AS 91101, NCEA Level 2)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	• Focused on teacher supervision • Clear guidance on AI use	Teacher led with some learner responsibility
Singapore: O-level, N-level and A-level	No use of coursework							
Singapore: Project work	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, including ‘real-world’ focus requirement	Yes	Yes — well embedded	Time and volume	Teacher led
British Columbia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No/unclear	No/unclear	Heavily teacher led	Teacher led

Appendix 2: International jurisdictions — key information

Jurisdiction	Age compulsory education ends	Age of basic education assessment	Qualification name (most frequently used upper secondary, broadly analogous to National Courses)	Assessment and structural approach
Scotland	16	15–16	National Courses	• National 4: Internal assessment • National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher: external exams, externally set coursework • Reform ongoing
England	16 (further requirements to age 18)	14–16	GCSE A-level	• External, end-point exam is the primary assessment instrument • Non-exam assessment used where it is the only valid assessment method
Wales	16	14–16	GCSE	• Internal and external • Reformed qualifications are modular
Northern Ireland	16	14–16	GCSE	• Previously both modular and linear courses offered • Recent reform announcements suggest increasing use of linear approach at GCSE
Norway	16	15–16	Vitnemål fra Videregående Opplæring (Leaving Certificate from Upper Secondary)	• Limited use of external exams • Extensive use of internal assessment
British Columbia	18	17–18	B.C. Certificate of Education (Dogwood Diploma)	• Internal assessment
New Zealand	16	15–18	NCEA (three levels)	• External and internal • Reforms underway
Singapore	15	15	O-level, N-level and A-level	• Primarily external

Appendix 3: Approach to coursework at GCE A-level (England)

Course	AQA	Pearson Edexcel	Cambridge OCR	Eduqas (WJEC in England)
English Language	Requirements: Assignment 1: A student-designed language investigation (2,000 words, excluding data and quotations). Assignment 2: A piece of original writing and commentary (750 words each, excluding quotations).	Requirements: Assignment 1: Two pieces of original writing from the same genre, differentiated by function and/or audience (1500–2000 words). Assignment 2: One commentary, reflecting on the two pieces they have produced and making connections with their research (1000 words).	Requirements: Section A: 2000–2500 word 'Investigation of Language', detailed instructions provided for the report structure. Section B: Academic poster linked to the research project. Word count 750–1000 words.	Requirements: 2500–3500 word language investigation based on the study and research of a topic related to language and identity. Learners are required to choose a topic from the following list: language and self-representation; language and gender; language and culture; or language diversity.
English Literature	Requirements: 'Texts across time': Students write a 2500 word comparative critical study of two texts, one of which must have been written prior to 1900. Texts chosen for study must maximise opportunities for writing about comparative similarity and difference and must allow access to a	Requirements: One 2500–3000 word assignment which compares two texts. The selected texts may be linked by theme, movement, author or period. Literary study of both texts should be enhanced by study of the links and connections between them, different interpretations and the	Requirements: Task 1: Close reading OR re-creative writing with commentary (1 text). Task 2: Comparative Essay (2 texts). These will contribute to a folio of approximately 3000 words. Learners are required to study three literary texts. The three texts must include one prose	Requirements: One 2500–3500 word assignment based on the reading of two prose texts from different periods, one pre-2000 and one post-2000, nominated by the centre.

Course	AQA	Pearson Edexcel	Cambridge OCR	Eduqas (WJEC in England)
	range of critical views and interpretations, including over time. One of the texts can be studied by the whole class, (but not be assessed elsewhere on the course) but the other should be specific to the learner.	contexts in which they were written and received. There are no prescribed texts but centres must select complete texts which may be drawn from poetry, drama, prose or literary non-fiction.	text, one poetry text and one drama text: • the texts must have been first published or performed in 1900 or later • at least one of these texts must have been first published or performed in 2000 or later	
Combined	Requirements: A personal investigation that explores a specific technique or theme in both literary and non-literary discourse (2,500–3,000 words).	Requirements: Assignment 1: Two pieces of original writing, one piece of fiction writing and one piece of creative non-fiction writing. Assignment 2: One separate analytical commentary reflecting on the studied texts and pieces of writing they have produced.	Requirements: Task 1: Analytical and comparative writing. Task 2: Original writing: non-fiction. For task 1, analytical and comparative writing, learners write an essay of 1500–2000 words on a non-fiction text chosen from a list set by OCR and a second free choice text. One of the texts must have been published after 2000. For task 2, learners produce a piece of original non-fiction writing of 1000–1200 words.	N/A

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