



## Alternative Certification Model 2020–21: National QA Exercise Key Messages

<b>Subject</b>	<b>History</b>
<b>Level</b>	<b>AH</b>

This report provides information on themes emerging from the national quality assurance exercise, which is part of the Alternative Certification Model for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses.

A sample of candidates' assessed work from selected centres was reviewed to determine whether assessment was in line with the national standard. The evidence submitted may have been partial or incomplete and is unlikely to have represented all of the evidence that will be gathered to allow the centre to determine a provisional result.

The centres selected for review in this subject and at this level have been provided with specific feedback on the evidence that they submitted. The comments below highlight key points about the assessment approaches and instruments used and the sampled centres' assessment judgements, for all centres delivering the subject at this level to reflect upon and make any appropriate adjustments.

## Section 1: Comments on approach to assessment

Good practice was seen in all centres in the indication of the types of assessments and the conditions in which they were taken. Centres:

- ◆ created their own assessments
- ◆ used SQA 2021 NQ assessment resource
- ◆ used a range of SQA past papers
- ◆ provided marking instructions

It was good practice to adapt all past papers in line with the revisions to course assessment introduced for session 2019–20.

There was a range of evidence. Centres:

- ◆ Submitted a variety of evidence including essays, source responses and dissertations.
- ◆ Provided supporting documentation including timelines of support for candidates and a candidate dissertation logbook.

The moderation process documentation was also very thorough. Centres:

- ◆ Provided evidence of their moderation processes in a range of documentation.
- ◆ Included frameworks for Understanding Standards, procedural quality assurance documents and provisional result proformas.
- ◆ Detailed clear descriptions of evidence.

Centres indicated what they would be covering in their assessments. Centres:

- ◆ Provided essays, sources and dissertations where possible.
- ◆ Committed to completing the assessment of candidates by using dissertations and the SQA 2021 NQ assessment resource, in line with national standards. If not using this approach, a clear outline of the centre's assessment intentions in May 2021 was given.

### Approach to assessments

Assessment of the essays and the sources was under timed controlled conditions and reflected the current arrangements.

Where evidence consisted of practice responses, centres' commentary on their overall assessment approach confirmed that these early practice responses would not be used to inform provisional results.

Centres clearly reviewed candidates' responses using subject-specific guidance, resources on the Understanding Standards site and SQA marking instructions. The approach reflects good practice in following subject-specific guidance on key pieces of evidence. It was clear that many had fully engaged with Understanding Standards materials and webinars and had made full use of course reports on the Advanced Higher History subject page.

There was clear evidence of centre and local moderation, which is to be commended. Some used local authority quality assurance guides with candidate responses clearly annotated and moderated in the centre.

In other centres, there was a commitment to using local moderation groups, or working with a partner local authority school.

In one centre, an assessment judgement that was too harsh was altered after moderation. Furthermore, the centre outlined robust steps to remedy this in the future.

Some centres detailed the measures they had taken to guard against unconscious bias (anonymised scripts) and cross-marking. This was very helpful.

Significant efforts have been made to structure a logical progression of assessment, taking a concise and clear 'next steps' approach.

Centres provided detailed commentaries on the overall assessment approach where later assessments were to be made, and confirmed that evidence from the SQA 2021 NQ assessment resource and the dissertation would also be considered when making assessment judgements for provisional results. For many at the time of submission, owing to time constraints, the evidence did not include the more comprehensive student responses to their assessments, which were scheduled for May 2021.

Without modifying centre-devised assessments or past papers to make sure that they align with the revised specimen question paper, difficulties can arise. Using National Assessment Bank assessments (NABs) is very problematic because they do not conform to the current approach to source assessment.

Centre-devised essay questions were very much in line with the national standard. However, there are specific things to consider when making up an assessment. As detailed in the course specification, each field of study has 10 key issues. The italicised areas are where the source questions are selected from, but instead could be an essay. There are eight questions. There should be no overlap across the areas. You would not set two questions from the same area where this means using the same content. It is best to set one question from each area. In line with the modifications to the Advanced Higher History course assessment planned before 2021 Advanced Higher exams were cancelled, centres were informed of the two key issues that would not be directly assessed in the 2021 question paper in order to free up time for focused learning, teaching and assessment.

Centre-devised source questions are more complex. It is recommended that centres use past papers, but modify them so that the judgement is based on the current arrangements.

## Section 2: Comments on assessment judgements

Using the SQA 2021 NQ assessment resource was the most reliable way to ensure that the judgements were informed by the current course assessment. By looking at these marking instructions, centres could see the revisions which were implemented for session 2019–20. It is also possible to see this in the specimen question paper, which is on the Advanced Higher History subject page under the Past Papers and Marking Instructions tab.

### Essay questions

For essays, the best assessor comments on essays clearly referred to the essay grid and SQA marking instructions, and provided excellent feedback to the candidate on the need to provide thorough evidence, historical interpretations, analysis and evaluation. In the essay marking there was an awareness of the partnership of thoroughness and analysis, and where the narrative was strong but the analysis was limited.

The essay grid is the key to marking the essay. While the key drivers are thoroughness, analysis and evaluation, the other aspects can inform where in the mark range the essay sits. The introduction and conclusion should each be given a (separate) grade— not both together.

### Source questions

Some centres clearly engaged with Understanding Standards materials, and accurate, current marking codes were consistently applied throughout the assessment — for example, Rubric Provenance (RP) and Content Provenance (CP) in the *Evaluate the usefulness* question. The marking instructions and sources in some had not been amended in line with the changes to course assessment introduced for session 2019–20 (such as where 3 points of ‘Interpretation’ only are now available per source). These older marking instructions also indicated a split of 3/2 or 2/3 between Provenance and Interpretation in the *Evaluate the usefulness* question, whereas 3 marks are now applied to each skill. Rubric Provenance has a mark allocated to author, time and purpose; and Content Provenance is the interpretation of the source in relation to its usefulness.

The aim of the two-source questions is for candidates to consider the viewpoints in the sources, not to compare and not a *How fully...?*, which is about content of the source. In some cases, the candidate was not addressing the overall viewpoints in the source but looked more at the factual content instead. This is something to be aware of in assessment judgements.

In all assessments there was recognition of the importance of the use of historians’ views. In the essays, this is necessary to achieve more than 12 marks, and the quality of the use indicates progression further in the grade that can be awarded. A broad understanding of historical debate was evident in the strongest essays and, although using historical interpretations to aid analysis rather than to advance arguments, more credit can be given for the breadth shown. In the sources, 2 marks are ring-fenced for the historians’ views, but if there are more they can be subsumed into Wider Contextual Development (WCD). Where

there was no reference to historians in source responses, this was clearly acknowledged in reaching assessment judgements.

## **The Project-dissertation**

Project-dissertation evidence was submitted, though many centres were unable to provide examples of this. Those that did demonstrated good use of the expectations of the dissertation task, and used the dissertation grid to determine a grade.

## **Moderation process**

Centres used an impressive amount of internal and local collaboration to attain the assessment judgements.

This comprehensive approach meant that assessment judgements were accurate in many cases, but not all. In one centre, after local authority moderation, the marking was found to be too severe. This is because of a misunderstanding of the essay grid. The marking of the structure, analysis and evaluation of the essay was severe. In the source questions, credit was initially not given for Wider Contextual Development in the source responses. It is important to recognise when WCD points in the source questions link back to the issue in each question. This was an effective moderation and the centre acted on this feedback.

In other cases, the moderation confirmed the assessors' judgements, but both had been cautious in their assessment judgements. Here the advice is to look at the grid as the main guide for essays as suggested above.

All centres provided very useful notes and annotations explaining how the assessment judgements were reached. They also used relevant SQA materials including the essay and dissertation grids and marking instructions. It is important to update the allocation of marks in the sources in line with the current arrangements.

## **Recommendations**

A key point is to make sure that, if not using the SQA 2021 NQ assessment resource, source assessments are modified, and to focus on the grid as the main assessment tool for the essays and the dissertation.

Good practice was commended, and there was recognition of the substantial amount of work which the profession had undertaken to ensure that the assessment judgements were valid and reliable. The internal and local collaboration was significant, and meetings on virtual platforms had been used to discuss issues and finalise judgements.

All centres were commended for the documentation of the ACM process. Protocols were in place and transparent. Candidates were made aware of assessment judgments in a considered manner and advice to improve was very clear. There was real engagement with the SQA documentation and the Understanding Standards support materials and webinars.

While not all assessments had been undertaken, the recommendation was to refer to the key SQA documentation to ensure the validity of assessments and the reliability of the judgements.

For ease of access, see the hyperlinks below for relevant documents. Going forward, use of SQA support materials below will further support adherence to national standards.

- ◆ **Subject guidance:** [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/ah-guidance-evidence-history.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/ah-guidance-evidence-history.pdf)
- ◆ **Course Specification:** [https://www.sqa.org.uk/files\\_ccc/AHCourseSpecHistory.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/AHCourseSpecHistory.pdf)
- ◆ **Coursework Assessment Task:** [https://www.sqa.org.uk/files\\_ccc/AHCATHistory.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/AHCATHistory.pdf)
- ◆ **Understanding Standards materials:** <https://www.understandingstandards.org.uk/Subjects/History/advanced> 'Additional resources for Session 2020–21'
- ◆ **Webinars:** Understanding Standards tab on Advanced Higher History subject page: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/48466.html>