



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

<b>Subject</b>	<b>English</b>
<b>Level</b>	<b>Higher</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

## Summary of evidence

Almost all centres submitted evidence for five candidates.

The majority of centres submitted evidence for more than one component.

Across the selected centres, evidence of all four components was seen.

## Assessment approach

In all selected centres, the approach to assessment was in accordance with SQA's guidance on gathering key evidence.

From the supporting documentation provided, it was clear that most centres had either used, or were intending to use, the SQA 2021 NQ assessment resources.

Generally, centres made effective use of the SQA 2021 assessment resources or a commercially produced assessment (P&N 2021), which contained appropriate course coverage and was in line with national standards.

A small number of centres used commercially produced assessments from previous years, which had been kept secure and were in line with national standards.

A small number of centres devised their own assessments, which often used or adapted a range of SQA past papers, and therefore had appropriate course coverage and level of demand.

For Portfolio-writing, all approaches to assessment were valid. All centres referenced the coursework assessment task and marking instructions, and based assessment on either broadly creative or broadly discursive evidence, which replicates the customary assessment approach for Portfolio-writing. This allowed candidates to take advantage of the usual large degree of personalisation and choice available for the task. It also gave candidates helpful flexibility in terms of the timing of the assessment.

## Section 2: Comments on assessment judgements

### Assessment judgements

Generally, centres' assessment judgements were valid, reliable and in line with national standards. They were clearly recorded against specific aspects of performance.

In the vast majority of centres, candidates were assessed accurately, fairly and consistently in accordance with national standards.

Generally, the evidence provided showed a considerable sense of candidate engagement, and assessors' feedback was detailed, helpful and supportive.

Centres' assessment judgements were accurate, on the whole. Nevertheless, there were occasional instances where marking instructions in Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation, and Scottish Text had been applied too leniently. This was apparent in analysis-based questions, where, occasionally, centres awarded 2 marks for a comment where 1 mark would have been appropriate. Centres should be aware of this when making their own assessment judgements. SQA Understanding Standards materials for Higher English provide further exemplification in this area.

Evidence included assessors' comments and other relevant supporting evidence, which clearly showed the basis on which assessment judgements had been made. Some centres provided detailed commentaries on portfolio pieces, which made very effective use of the language of the marking instructions.

The assessment of Portfolio-writing indicated widespread familiarity with standards for this component. SQA Understanding Standards materials contains key exemplars that demonstrate important indicators for the assessment of Writing at Higher English. A 'route map' for Higher English is now available from SQA Understanding Standards to help assessors find examples of particular types and genres of writing, and specific mark ranges.

In a normal external assessment diet, where a piece of writing exceeds the word count by more than 10%, or there is a genre infringement in the Critical Reading assessment, this would be referred to the principal assessor, who would consider it and apply a penalty on case-by-case basis. Given the current circumstances, it would not be possible for SQA to guarantee a consistent and fair national approach for the imposition of penalties. Accordingly, we do not believe that penalties would be appropriate this year.

There was clear evidence of thorough, detailed and highly effective internal moderation procedures at most centres and at local authority level. Examples included detailed checklists, evidence of marking by more than one teacher, discussion of marks in departments/faculties, and standardisation of assessments prior to marking.

## **General comments**

There was clear evidence of candidates' effective learning. Candidates were broadly successful in meeting the required standards of attainment for this course.

There was clear evidence that teachers and lecturers are working hard to develop and encourage the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for this course. This was apparent across all four key areas (Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation; Scottish Text; Critical Essay and Portfolio-writing).

Candidates showed clear engagement with their learning in the choice of topics for Portfolio-writing and in research for discursive writing.

Candidates also showed engagement and enthusiasm for literary texts, both for Scottish Text and Critical Essay. There was evidence of effective teaching of a wide range of appropriate texts.

Many centres provided helpful feedback to candidates, particularly on portfolio pieces and critical essays.