



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

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	Higher

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

The nature of evidence submitted by individual centres varied from one 12-mark extended-response per candidate to full question paper 1 and question paper 2 scripts. Most centres submitted either a full question paper 1 script or a single 20-mark extended-response per candidate. Question paper 1 evidence was more commonly submitted than question paper 2 evidence.

The assessment instruments submitted were a mixture of centre-produced instruments utilising a variety of SQA past papers, SQA 2021 assessment resources, and occasionally, commercially produced items. The majority of centres made effective use of SQA's 2021 resources. The vast majority of assessment instruments submitted were in line with national standards and demonstrated good practice.

When using commercially produced assessment items, centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure they are of an appropriate standard. Centres should also avoid setting SQA past papers in their entirety as assessments. (Please refer to SQA subject-specific guidance on gathering key evidence.) Where assessments are considered to be of greater or of lesser demand, then this should be taken into account if they are being used as part of the evidence base on which to determine provisional results.

The majority of centres provided evidence of thorough internal, inter-school and local authority quality assurance procedures. This was often evidenced by extensive policy documents and notes detailing professional discussion. The majority of centres also provided detailed and informative annotations on candidate evidence, which proved helpful to the process and provided useful feedback for candidates.

Overall, the vast majority of evidence submitted showed a thorough, knowledgeable and professional approach to assessment.

Section 2: Comments on assessment judgements

The vast majority of assessment judgements were in line with national standards and marking instructions. Very occasionally, some centres applied marking instructions either too severely or too leniently.

In a few centres, candidates were over-credited for very basic knowledge. Centres should note that the phrases 'this shows...' or 'this demonstrates...' in extended-response answers do not automatically mean that an analysis mark should be credited. This often over-credits repetition.

There was some inconsistency in the allocation of structure marks in 20-mark extended-responses. Candidates should identify a clear and consistent line of argument to access both structure marks. (Centres should refer to published SQA marking instructions for further guidance on this issue.)

A few centres applied the marking instructions incorrectly in question paper 2 evidence for the 'conclusions' question. Candidates should not be credited for formulating a valid conclusion. They should only be credited for correctly interpreting source evidence that supports their conclusion. Centres should not award a mark at the end of a paragraph for a repeat or re-phrasing of an original conclusion. Centres should also be aware that a candidate who fails to provide a valid conclusion, but groups evidence under each bullet point, should be given no credit.

Overall, the evidence submitted showed effective learning in Higher Modern Studies. There was clear and compelling evidence that teachers and lecturers are working hard to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for this course. This was evident in the way candidates engaged with political and social issues in their responses.