



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

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Biology</b>
<b>Level</b>	<b>National 5</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

Most centres submitted partial evidence. A small number of centres submitted complete evidence.

A range of assessment materials was used. The majority of the evidence was centre-devised. Some centres indicated that they would use the SQA 2021 paper with other assessments to form a holistic judgement to determine candidates' provisional results.

Centre-devised assessments mainly consisted of a mixture of SQA past paper questions and commercially produced questions. It is the responsibility of centres to ensure that any centre-devised or commercially produced papers meet the criteria in the SQA question paper brief and are in line with the information in the current course specification. Centres should ensure that their assessments have the correct balance and level of demand, and appropriate cut-off scores.

Some centres documented the course coverage of their assessments and the balance of demonstrating knowledge, applying knowledge, skills and grade A marks. However, many of these assessments did not fully meet the criteria in the SQA question paper brief. In many cases, assessments were weighted towards demonstrating knowledge questions compared to applying knowledge, which lowers the level of demand.

Some centres had structured their assessments to ensure that marks were evenly distributed across each topic. However, some centres split assessments so that the questions only covered limited topic areas, increasing the predictability of the content of each paper. This reduces the level of demand compared to assessments with questions that have been randomised across topics. This approach does not offer candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their ability in integrated questions or to show retention of knowledge across the course.

If using older past paper questions, centres should ensure that they only examine content from the current course specification. Centres should also ensure that marking instructions are in line with current marking practice as exemplified in the SQA Understanding Standards materials.

All centres submitted marking instructions for their assessments. It is good practice to build a set of marking instructions at the same time as the assessment is constructed. These should be reviewed and modified in light of candidate responses.

Although the marking guidance provided in SQA past papers and commercially produced papers is not intended to be exhaustive and can be modified, centres must ensure that any modifications meet national standards. All marking instructions should be agreed by all involved in the marking process.

Several centres indicated the cut-off scores that they would use for each assessment. Good practice was evident where centres had taken account of the level of demand of the assessment(s) to determine appropriate cut-off scores.

Centres should note that SQA unit assessment support (UAS) packs can only be used to support provisional results at grade 'C' as they do not assess beyond grade 'C'. They cannot be used as the only evidence to determine a provisional result.

The majority of centres provided evidence of cross-marking and moderation, and many included notes on the discussions that had taken place.

## **Section 2: Comments on assessment judgements**

Most centres' assessment judgements were generally in line with national standards, and marking instructions were appropriate and well applied. Where marking deviated from national standards, the most common issue was leniency, but this was often addressed by the moderation process.

Before marking candidate responses, centres should ensure that all markers are familiar with the general marking principles, which must be applied. Some centres had not applied these principles, especially for (k) incorrect spelling and (l) presentation of data.

It is good practice for centres to carry out cross-marking and internal and/or external moderation. Any changes to marking instructions must be agreed, noted and applied consistently by all involved in the marking and moderation processes. Although there was often evidence of cross-marking, in some instances the cross-marker and the original marker made judgements that were not in line with the marking instructions.

In some centres the marking of extended-response questions was less secure, particularly when judgement was required about the extent to which candidate responses were meaningful and coherent. Marks should be awarded for descriptions and expanded points rather than the statement of simple phrases that are not in the correct context. It is good practice when marking extended-response questions to use annotated ticks to indicate where the marks are awarded. Doing this makes it easier for centres to check where marks are awarded and prevents more than 1 mark being allocated to a point.

Some centres included good records of the assessment judgements and decisions made when reviewing candidates' responses.

Centres should note that provisional results must be based on demonstrated attainment across the entire course.