



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

Subject	English
Level	National 5

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

All centres submitted appropriate assessment evidence. Many centres submitted evidence for all four components.

Centres' approaches to assessment closely followed the SQA English National 5 guidance on gathering key evidence.

To assess question paper components, almost all centres made effective use of either the SQA 2021 assessment resources or commercially produced papers. The latter contained appropriate course coverage and were in line with national standards.

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

For Writing, all centres adopted the English National 5 coursework assessment task approach. 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.

Centres have complete freedom of choice of texts studied for Critical essay, and this was used to advantage by centres in their selections to suit candidates' needs and circumstances. It was encouraging to see candidates engaging with challenging and rewarding literature, including William Blake.

Section 2: Comments on assessment judgements

It was clear overall that there had been a considerable focus within centres on making appropriate assessment judgements. Candidates were assessed accurately, fairly and consistently in accordance with national standards.

The evidence provided showed a strong sense of candidates engaging with their learning for National 5 English. Assessors' feedback was largely detailed, positive and supportive.

For shorter questions of the type seen in Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation and in Scottish texts, assessors adhered tightly to marking instructions. These forms of assessment are sometimes called 'close reading,' and it was clear from the national moderation exercise that 'close marking' has been the norm, with assessors carefully indicating precise points in candidates' responses where marks were awarded. There was good, general awareness of the National 5 marking principle of 1 mark for each point of understanding, 1 mark for an appropriate reference from the text, and 1 mark for a relevant analytical comment. Reference is not necessarily synonymous with exact quotation (please see the National 5 English Course Specification for more details), and candidates can be rewarded for responding with a correct reference, even if the accompanying comment is incorrect, or missing.

Assessments which involve candidates' extended writing — Critical essay and Portfolio-writing — present a different challenge to assessors, as a holistic judgement required. The following advice might be helpful here:

- ◆ Referring to the appropriate SQA marking grid, try first to assign the candidate's work to a 'mark range.' If the statements contained in this range seem to match the piece, then a mark from the middle of the range would be appropriate. When the piece seems to straddle two mark ranges you are deciding between only two marks: the lowest mark of the upper range, and the highest mark of the lower range.

The assessment of Portfolio-writing indicated widespread familiarity with standards for this component. SQA Understanding Standards materials contain key exemplars that demonstrate important indicators for the assessment of Writing at National 5 English. A 'route map' for National 5 English is now available from SQA Understanding Standards to help you 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 a strong degree of moderation both within centres and in local networks. Many centres held pre-assessment markers' meetings in which they reviewed marking instructions and sought guidance from SQA Understanding Standards resources. Moderation activities must be rooted in national standards, and SQA Understanding Standards gives clear exemplification of standards across all components. Following initial marking, assessment judgements were often carefully refined, and brought closer to national standards through

cross-marking or team moderation. It was frequently possible to see the workings of this process: deliberations and re-adjustments were visible as many centres provided commentaries to explain their thinking and its evolution. All this served to underline the worth and value of collaborative practice.