

NPFS – INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS 2021

The pandemic has caused a lot of disruption to learning this school year. The formal Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) exams are cancelled and a different way to decide results for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses has been created by representatives from across the education system. This is called the Alternative Certification Model.

What is the Alternative Certification Model?

The fairest way to decide National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher results for 2021 is to use evidence of your child's knowledge and skills relating to each of their courses. Learners will therefore take tests or assessments set by their school, college or training provider and teaching staff will mark this work which will be used to evidence what grades should be awarded at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. Teachers and lecturers know their learners best and have access to optional SQA resources to create the assessment for their class.

Teachers and lecturers will mark their own learners' tests which will be cross checked by at least one other subject teacher rather than the tests being sent away for external marking. It is felt that the fairest way to award qualifications for 2021 is by using teachers' professional judgement of learner's work.

The Assessments *sound* like an exam – what is different to any other year?

In a 'normal' year there would be a one-off national exam for each course sat during an 'exam diet'. Learners across Scotland would usually sit the same exam paper at the same time for most subjects to count alongside projects, folio work or practical assessment. For 2021, each school will now plan their own class tests and assessments to test the knowledge of learners in each subject area. SQA have supplied schools with a wide range of optional assessment resources which can be tailored for the learners. This means that children in different schools may undertake different forms of assessment to evidence their level of learning in a particular subject. Learners will be tested on a reduced element of the course and each school, college and training provider will decide when it is appropriate to carry out assessments.

There are processes in place to ensure fairness in marking learners work to the same standard across the country. Schools, colleges and training providers will carry out checks to ensure assessments are consistent and fair. A selection of assessment evidence will also be cross checked from every school by SQA.

How can we be sure that it is fair?

Fairness for all learners means that teachers cannot assume or guess the knowledge of young people but need to see demonstrated learning.

What does 'controlled conditions' mean?

Learners need to have their knowledge tested using specific criteria for their course so that the results awarded are earned and reflect the learner's level of understanding of the subject. Controlled conditions means that the assessment is done 'closed book', in most cases under typical exam conditions – supervised, with desks spaced out to prevent copying, with no aids to learning (such as notes, textbooks or electronic aid), no talking and with a time limit applied.

What about Additional Support Needs?

Where additional support requirements have been identified these will be met by the school and there should be no changes to previous arrangements. There are many different types of support available and schools should ensure appropriate allowances and resources remain in place for your child.

What are assessment diets?

Rather than a one-off exam, a series of assessments will allow learners more than one chance to produce their best work in a particular subject. Some schools, colleges and training providers are referring to this as an assessment diet. This is different to the one-off final exam that would normally occur with a full SQA exam diet and is designed to be as fair as possible for learners who have had considerable disruption to learning over the last year.

When will we know what the provisional grades are?

Learners will be told their provisional grades by their school. In practical terms, learners will know their grades by 25th June 2021 at the very latest.

What happens after 25th June?

SQA will check that there are no clerical errors between the school and the SQA system. There is no algorithm or filter applied to amend grades submitted, simply a check and balance that the data is complete as supplied by the school prior to certificates being sent.

When is Results Day?

Learners will receive their paper certificates by post on 10th August 2021. Learners who sign up for the text and/or email results service at www.mysqa.org.uk will also receive this on results day.

Can my child Appeal their result?

Following a consultation carried out in March, the National Qualifications 2021 Group will work together to agree the Appeals process for this year. We will share further information on this as soon as it is available.

Where can I get more information?

To stay up to date on the Alternative Certification Model and National Qualifications for 2021 visit sqa.org.uk/NQ2021

Timelines for learners

- April 2021 – focus on learning and teaching and revision prior to assessments.
- April and May 2021 – schools, colleges and training providers will carry out checks to make sure that assessment is fair and consistent among centres. A selection of assessment evidence from every school, college and training provider will be reviewed by SQA to help ensure the application of standards is consistent across the whole of Scotland.
- End of May into June 2021 – final stages of revision and assessments
- 25th June 2021 – this is the final deadline for all provisional results to be submitted by schools, colleges and training providers to SQA. These results will not be changed but will be checked by SQA to ensure no clerical errors have happened during submission.
- 10th August – Results day.