

Course Assessment Arrangements for Session 2020-21:

Frequently Asked Questions

The SQA during the first half of November provided advice to centres on a subject by subject basis in relation to some aspects of the altered assessment arrangements for this session arising from the challenges presented by COVID 19. EIS members contacted the EIS Education Department with questions in response to the publication of the SQA advice. These and the accompanying answers are detailed below.

How should the key items of assessment that will inform teacher estimates be approached?

The EIS view is that these should be treated as a series, 3 or 4 items, of classroom based assessments conducted from December/January to May to enable maximum capitalisation on the extra time for learning and teaching that was created by the cancellation of the N5 exam diet.

Assessments should be planned across the remainder of the school session to take account of student readiness for undertaking them and any requirements in relation to local moderation procedures, which in turn should be designed with the needs of learners as an essential consideration.

Marking of candidate responses should be subject to internal moderation procedures as agreed at departmental/school/ local authority level.

Feedback provided to students on an ongoing basis as would be good assessment practice under normal circumstances.

The EIS has stated its opposition to the scheduling of prelims for N5 candidates. What does this mean?

With the cancellation of the diet, there is no need for prelims (practice for the final exam) to take place.

The EIS is clear that assessment of N5 students' work should be classroom based and timed to suit the needs of learners such that they are best able to demonstrate the full extent of their knowledge and skills in the area of the course being assessed at any given time.

The running of prelims in the usual way to generate key assessment evidence for large N5 cohorts would:

- incur COVID infection risk;
- generate additional workload for teachers and students;
- use up swathes of valuable learning and teaching time;
- be contrary to the wellbeing principle of the Recovery Curriculum;
- create equity issues.*

*The scheduling of prelims as a means of gathering key assessment evidence is likely to further disadvantage learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds who have already been disproportionately impacted by the disruption to education caused by COVID-19.

Young people from the poorest backgrounds were most disadvantaged by school closure and lockdown, being least able to engage with digital and remote learning. Many continue to experience the cognitive and wellbeing impacts of the initial period of lockdown in terms of their learning in school and are the group that are likely to be furthest behind in terms of 'recovery'.

This group is also now disproportionately affected by the prevalence of the virus in the community. Young people from poorer backgrounds have had to self-isolate in greater numbers and more often than their more affluent peers.

As a group, therefore, they are least likely to be ready to undertake prelim exams across a range of subjects, the results of which would be likely to significantly influence final estimates. There are real equity issues to be considered in the specific context of COVID-19.

In general, it is known that exams disproportionately favour more affluent students. Continuous assessment, that the alternative certification model for N5 is designed to prioritise, is less disadvantageous to learners from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. In the interests of greater equity of outcome, therefore, the EIS supports the continuous assessment model rather than prelims as substitute for the final exam.

Is the SQA providing prelims for N5?

No. Past papers are not intended to be prelim papers. Their issue, along with marking schemes and worked exemplars, was intended to support an understanding of standards and consistency of marking.

SQA provided assessment instruments which may be used as standalone items but school based assessments are equally valid. Some early communication from the SQA gave the impression that they were

providing prelim material but this has been corrected in subsequent SQA communications to centres.

The SQA agrees that prelims are not necessary for N5 students this session and understands the associated COVID risks of running them in the usual way.

How do we respond to potentially increased workload associated with N5 alternative awards?

Not marking prelims is one way of avoiding a double dint of marking prelims and classroom based evidence.

As with all aspects of NQ-related workload, it must be possible for this to be overtaken within the parameters of the 35-hour working week. It is not acceptable for teachers to be asked to work beyond their contracts without payment for doing so.

Where departments or individual staff members are concerned that the workload associated with the alternative awards for N5 (or any other aspect of their workload) exceeds what is possible to be overtaken within the 35-hour week when considered alongside all other priorities, then a workload audit should be conducted.

These audits should identify the work to be undertaken and the number of hours per task per week. Where workload in any week exceeds 35 hours' worth, the matter should be raised as an item of collegiate discussion with the SMT in order to agree appropriate prioritisation and alleviation of workload.

Should the outcomes of the discussion be unsatisfactory, then the matter should be raised with the School/Branch Rep or Local Association Secretary, who will advise on potential next steps to resolve the matter.

How will the arrangements for moderation be determined?

Schools have moderation processes in place already, as do colleges and local authorities. In many cases these were refined last session to enable schools and colleges to respond to the requirement for teacher judgements as the basis for awards at N5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

There may be adjustments to processes this session at school, college and local authority levels in light of last year's experiences and in response to SQA guidance on good practice around moderation which has been made available via the SQA Academy Course, for example.

Final approaches to moderation, taking account of SQA guidance, should be agreed at LNCT and by College Branches.

Is it compulsory to attend moderation events after the end of the pupil/student day?

Where there are agreements in place locally and at school/college level around the working time identified for moderation events, attendance of all relevant staff is expected.

In the absence of such agreements and especially where working time arrangements cannot accommodate additional NQ-related workload such as moderation events, there can be no compulsion for teachers to attend.

Teachers are not required to accede to requests/demands to work beyond their contracted hours.

Moderation events should not be conducted on an in-person face to face basis at this time. Moderation events and meetings should be held virtually with teachers attending by logging onto computers from their own classrooms/ workspaces in school/college or from home.

What will be the arrangements for quality assurance (QA) of estimates?

Schools, colleges and local authorities have QA processes in place already. Some of these were adjusted to take account of the circumstances of last session and may be adjusted further this session in response to the particular arrangements for the alternative certification of N5 and the corresponding SQA advice.

In addition to the QA that will occur at school, college and local authority levels, the SQA as directed by the Deputy First Minister will conduct a sampling exercise looking at assessment judgements across all presenting centres and all subjects.

Centres will not be asked to provide samples of candidate evidence for all subjects. Subject selection is likely to be on a random basis. Details of the sampling process will be announced by the end of November.

The EIS is clear that the SQA should not be empowered to overturn school estimates. Last session we urged professional dialogue if concerns were identified, although SQA declined to take this approach. We are insisting that it does so this session.

There will also be facility for centres to seek QA support from colleagues in other centres and from the SQA.

Final approaches to QA, taking account of SQA guidance, should be agreed at LNCT and by College Branches.

What is the EIS view on the modifications that the SQA have made to course assessment for this session?

The EIS made clear in its response to the SQA's consultation on assessment modifications that what was being proposed did not go far enough in addressing the concerns of teachers about the volume of course content and assessment to be covered in light of the COVID disruption experienced throughout the summer term and in early part of the session, as well as anticipation of further significant COVID disruption throughout the year.

The EIS response to the consultation (based on responses provided by Secondary members of Council for numerous subjects) can be read here: (add link)

When are estimates for N5 to be submitted?

Current discussions suggest that the deadline for estimates submission will be the end of May. The SQA will advise on this by the end of November.

Will there be pre-submission appeals against moderated teacher estimates?

The EIS has strongly opposed this as an approach, arguing that the right to appeal should be by individual students (rather than by schools or colleges) to the SQA, post-results. The issue is still under discussion.

Will teachers be paid for marking items of N5 assessment for the production of estimates?

The EIS has raised this matter with the SQA, which so far, has stated that there are no plans to introduce payments for the marking of internal assessments or production of estimates.

What are the contingency plans for the Higher and Advanced Higher diet?

These are still in preparation. The EIS is concerned not only at the risk posed by pressing ahead with a full diet but also that a high stakes assessment will fail to take account of the disrupted learning experience of many pupils, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. Cancellation of the H and AH diet now would create around 6 weeks' additional teaching time and allow for suitable contingencies to be established. This is the position the EIS favours.

What will be the impact of the alternative certification model for N5 on candidates who receive Additional Assessment Arrangements (AAA)?

The EIS has raised this matter with the SQA. We are of the view that students who would normally have received AAA should receive the appropriate assistance in undertaking in-class assessments and are seeking clarification from the SQA of how this will be ensured in practice.

Why have there been no changes made to Higher and Advanced Higher Drama to take account of current public health restrictions?

The EIS has raised this matter with Education Scotland, SQA and the Scottish Government. We continue to assert that health and safety measures, underpinned by sound scientific evidence must be the top priority; and have highlighted the need for adjustment of deadlines and assessment demands to take account of current public health imperatives and accompanying Education Scotland advice.

SQA and Education Scotland are now looking closely at what can be done to reconcile the public health and assessment demands for Drama.