



Friday 26th March 2021

Dear Parents/Carers

Ellon Academy Senior Phase Assessment Block - Monday 26 April – Friday 28 May 2021

Background Information:

As you will be aware, the 2021 National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams have been cancelled due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This also means that coursework will not be marked by the SQA, however, it can still count towards evidence of learners' results. This is a very important point, because some learners will already have completed or will complete some coursework which could be used as supporting evidence. All of our plans are reliant on the Depute First Minister giving the green light for schools to open fully, with no 2-metre distancing after the Easter Break.

Previously the SQA advised that we needed to have two to four pieces of evidence to consider an estimate grade, but this advice has changed in that if we use an SQA approved assessment that covers sufficient course breadth and depth, then we may need only have this one piece of evidence.

The SQA have produced such assessments and are allowing schools the flexibility to break these assessments up and sit them over more than one session, this being just one of the initiatives to try and mitigate the impact of the situation our learners find themselves in regarding the Pandemic and online learning etc.

Having anticipated significant disruption to learning this session, actions have been taken across the Scottish education system to ensure learner evidence that demonstrates attainment can be gathered:

- SQA has reduced the evidence requirements for each National Course to the minimum necessary to preserve the validity and public confidence in the qualifications.

- SQA has also published 116 subject-specific guidance documents across National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses.
 - These documents summarise the key pieces of evidence required as the basis for provisional results.
 - They also highlight the option of separating and adapting assessments, so teachers and lecturers have the flexibility to assess learners at times and in ways that are appropriate to their needs.
 - In many subjects, assessment components have been removed and content and contexts have been reduced to enable a narrower focus for this session.
- Planned National Qualification verification activity has also been reduced to allow more time to support learning and teaching.

When provisional results are communicated to SQA by schools and colleges at the end of June, they will have already been subject to sample-based quality assurance and approval processes within the school or college. There will also have been other activity carried out to support standards, for example, by local authorities. These steps are supported by national quality assurance activity undertaken by SQA and ‘Understanding Standards’ materials published by SQA.

The Alternative Certification Model:

The government set up the National Qualifications Group 2021 who did a public consultation and as a result the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) was devised which included details such as removal of what was being assessed, no external coursework to be sent away, no requirement for prelim exams, flexibility to break assessments into smaller chunks, flexibility over when these assessments would be held – and these changes are deemed appropriate by the NQ2021 group to mitigate for the situation our learners have found themselves in this academic year.

[2021 Delivering National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher results in 2020-21 – parents/carers \(sqa.org.uk\)](https://www.sqa.org.uk/parents-carers)

[2021 Delivering National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher results in 2020-21 – learners \(sqa.org.uk\)](https://www.sqa.org.uk/learners)

This means that the SQA need a different way to decide your son/daughter’s National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher results. This is called the Alternative Certification Model. The SQA expected a lot of disruption to learning this session, therefore, it has made several amendments to support young people sitting assessments under the Alternative Certification Model.

- The SQA has reduced the evidence needed for each National Course to the minimum, whilst making sure that qualifications remain valid and credible.
- The SQA has also introduced more flexibility for how and when assessments need to be done, as well as extending the date for teachers to send provisional results, to help provide more learning and teaching time.

The Process:

At Ellon Academy, Principal Teachers and Senior Leaders have been working hard to interpret SQA information as soon as it has arrived in school. It has been extremely challenging to put together our timeline for assessments because, even as late as this week, we were still receiving guidelines, changes, and key dates from the SQA. Between Easter and Summer, there are specific key dates which relate to the wide range of SQA units and course entry deadlines, over and above the deadlines for National 4, 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. The final date for submission of grades is Friday 25th June, (last day of term) and schools must build in time for marking, moderation, verification, and quality assurance procedures to verify our provisional grades.

There has been an extensive consultation process involving Senior Leaders, Principal Teachers, teaching staff and the Parent Council, with the overarching aim to do the very best for our pupils as we possibly can. We have looked at 5 differing models of assessment and the one we have decided upon is the one that maximising pupils' opportunities to show assessment evidence and to continue to benefit from quality learning and teaching. Therefore, we have developed our Assessment Block Calendar (attached) to dovetail with the SQA deadlines and key dates.

Assessment Block Calendar

At Ellon Academy we intend to run a 5-week assessment block from Monday 26 April – Friday 28 May inclusive. During this period, pupils will undertake assessments in their classes in a managed way, which should help limit the number of assessments they sit on any one day, whilst maximising the in-school learning, teaching, revision, feedback, and support time during the 5 weeks. Assessments have been mostly timetabled in your son/daughter's double period for their certificate classes, and will generally take place in their normal classroom, unless advised otherwise.

Pupils will have the full benefit of working with their teachers prior to their different assessments and teachers will ensure that pupils know what to expect from each assessment in terms of the format and what is being assessed.

There are approximately 500 pupils in senior school, and it is a huge task to timetable for the different combinations of subjects that they have, so therefore, the timetable is arranged by year group and column. Columns determine which periods a pupil attends a particular subject, so in order to support pupils with their assessment timetable, each assessment will be in normal class times over a double period and the timings of these assessments will not exceed what is expected within that time frame.

- Please see the tables below to work out which column your son/daughter's subjects are in if they are unsure. Having their timetable to hand may also help.
- Teachers will also inform pupils of the dates/periods for their class assessments. Pupils will be provided with a blank 'My Assessment/Study Planner' to record these whilst in school.
- Assessment dates/times/venues and details will also be confirmed through your son/daughter's Google Classroom for each subject and will appear on their 'To Do' list on Google Classroom
- Pupils' 'To Do' lists will also be visible on Google Guardian for parents/carers to see

Here is a link to the suggested 'My Assessment/Study Planner in the Pupil Zone of our school website and the Assessment Block Timetable:

[Ellon Academy Community Campus](#)

Column Timetable Structure:

S4 Columns							
Day/Periods	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Monday	P5	P5	P1 & 2	P6 & 7			P4
Tuesday	P2	P2	P1		P5		P6
Wednesday	P1 & 2	P1 & 2				P 3 & 4	P5 & 6
Thursday			P3	P6	P4	P5	
Friday				P4	P5 & 6	P3	

S5/6 Columns					
Day/Periods	A	B	C	D	E
Monday	P1 & 2	P6 & 7	P3 & 4	P5	
Tuesday	P1		P7	P2	P3 & 4
Wednesday				P1, 2 & 3	
Thursday	P 3 & 4	P5 & 6			P1 & 2
Friday		P4	P1 & 2		P3

Number of Assessments as per Faculty Requirements:

As you will see that many assessments are in the 2nd half of the assessment block and the reason for this is to allow pupils maximum teaching time and support prior to the assessment.

Faculty	Subject	Course Level	Assessment Block First Half	Assessment Block Second Half
Business Education	Accounting	National 5	1	1
Business Education	Accounting	Higher	1	1
Business Education	Administration & IT	National 5	1	1
Business Education	Administration & IT	Higher	1	1
Business Education	Business Management	National 5	1	1
Business Education	Business Management	Higher	1	1
Business Education	PC Passport	SCQF L5	1	1
Creative Arts	Acting and Performance	SCQF 46	1	1
Creative Arts	Art	National 5	nil	1
Creative Arts	Art	Higher	nil	1
Creative Arts	Art	Advanced Higher	nil	1
Creative Arts	Drama	National 5	1	1
Creative Arts	Drama	Higher	1	1
Creative Arts	Drama	Advanced Higher	1	1
Creative Arts	Music	National 5	nil	1
Creative Arts	Music	Higher	nil	1
Creative Arts	Music	Advanced Higher	nil	1
Creative Arts	Music Tech	National 5	nil	1
Creative Arts	Music Tech	Higher	nil	1
Creative Arts	Photography	Higher	nil	1
Creative Arts	Professional Theatre Prep	SCQF 46	1	1
English	English	National 5	1	2
English	English	Higher	1	2
English	English	Advanced Higher	1	2
English	Journalism	SCQF 6	1	2
English	Media	National 5	nil	2
English	Media	Higher	1	2
English	Scottish Studies	SCQF 45	1	1
Health and Wellbeing	Physical Education	National 5	nil	1
Health and Wellbeing	Physical Education	Higher	1	1
Health and Wellbeing	Physical Education	Advanced Higher	nil	nil
Health and Wellbeing	Dance	National 5	nil	1

Health and Wellbeing	Health and Food Technology	National 5	1	nil
Health and Wellbeing	Hospitality	National 5	nil	1
Humanities	Geography	National 5	1	1
Humanities	Geography	Higher	1	1
Humanities	Geography	Advanced Higher	1	1
Humanities	History	National 5	1	1
Humanities	History	Higher	nil	1
Humanities	History	Advanced Higher	1	1
Humanities	Modern Studies	National 5	1	1
Humanities	Modern Studies	Higher	1	1
Humanities	Modern Studies	Advanced Higher	1	1
Humanities	RMPS	National 5	1	1
Humanities	RMPS	Higher	1	1
Humanities	RMPS	Advanced Higher	nil	1
Mathematics	Applications of Mathematics	National 5	nil	2
Mathematics	Mathematics	National 5	nil	2
Mathematics	Mathematics	Higher	nil	2
Mathematics	Mathematics	Advanced Higher	nil	2
Mathematics	Mechanics of Mathematics	Advanced Higher	nil	1
Modern Languages	French	National 5	1	1
Modern Languages	French	Higher	1	1
Modern Languages	French	Advanced Higher	1	1
Modern Languages	German	National 5	1	1
Modern Languages	German	Higher	1	1
Modern Languages	German	Advanced Higher	1	1
Modern Languages	Spanish	National 5	1	1
Modern Languages	Spanish	Higher	1	1
Modern Languages	Spanish	Advanced Higher	1	1
Science	Biology	National 5	1	1
Science	Biology	Higher	1	1
Science	Biology	Advanced Higher	1	1
Science	Chemistry	National 5	1	1
Science	Chemistry	Higher	1	1
Science	Chemistry	Advanced Higher	1	1
Science	Physics	National 5	1	1

Science	Physics	Higher	1	1
Science	Physics	Advanced Higher	1	1
Technical	Engineering Science	National 5	nil	2
Technical	Engineering Science	Higher	nil	2
Technical	Graphic Communication	National 5	nil	2
Technical	Graphic Communication	Higher	nil	2
Technical	Practical Metalworking	National 5	nil	1
Technical	Practical Woodworking	National 5	nil	1

Study Leave

Our pupils have missed so much direct in-school teaching that we strongly feel that they will benefit from expected learning and teaching in school across the duration of the Assessment Block, therefore there will be no study leave. Pupils will be best prepared by remaining in school.

SQA Exam Conditions

Class assessments will be conducted under strict assessment conditions, like prelim or final exams.

Pupils will be informed about these expectations after the Easter break and parents/carers will also receive a supporting letter.

Coursework:

Coursework may be completed in some subjects (like practical subjects) and be used as part of the evidence towards learners' results. Coursework will be carried out under the assessment conditions set out in the guidance. The assessment conditions for completion of coursework may differ from one subject to the next. Some coursework will take the form of on-going assessment, which may not need to be carried out under a high degree of supervision and control of the assessment. SQA coursework assessment conditions guidance will be followed.

Coursework is different from assessments because in a normal year, this is completed during the teaching part of the course, however this year due to pupils not being in school, it has to take place at the same time as the end of year assessments. Most coursework was removed from subjects, but for those that remain, these will go ahead during the assessment block to provide additional evidence to support provisional. This is relevant to Graphic Communication and PE for example.

Evidence Gathering:

In Aberdeenshire, the decision on *what* evidence is gathered, *how* the evidence is gathered and *when* the evidence is gathered is at the discretion of each school, to suit local circumstances, education delivery plans and resources, whilst giving due consideration the following:

What evidence is gathered?

- SQA advise that estimates need to be based on *quality* of evidence over *quantity*.
- The predictive value of an assessment instrument is important.
- SQA have made available resources to support schools in evidence gathering which can be adapted to suit circumstances

How is evidence gathered?

- SQA have stated that there is no expectation of prelim diets or replication of exams
- SQA expectations regarding controlled conditions for evidence gathering need to be adhered to

When is evidence gathered?

- Across Aberdeenshire schools a range of assessment gathering timetables had been developed to suit local circumstances, education delivery plans and resources
- Many schools had already begun the evidence gathering process prior to Christmas, particularly in relation to National 5
- Schools will give due consideration to the health & wellbeing of young people in developing their assessment timetables over the period beyond Easter
- In Aberdeenshire our deadline for collection of candidate evidence has been set at 28th May to allow for the necessary marking, quality assurance process and data input to be undertaken

Additional Arrangements:

Teachers are aware if your son/daughter requires Additional Assessment arrangements and will put these in place for the assessment block in the same way as happens for other classroom assessments. This may mean using IT or having extra time to complete the assessment due to a specific learning need requirement. If there are any individual queries, please contact your child's Principal Teacher of Guidance or Mrs M Wilson, Principal Teacher Additional Support for Learners.

National 4 National Qualifications:

National 4 courses are always assessed internally by school staff. Teachers will inform pupils when their assessments are scheduled as usual, ensuring pupils are assessed at the most appropriate time.

Here is a link to the Ellon Academy Assessment Block Calendar 2021, posted on our school website:

[Ellon Academy Community Campus](#)

Quality Assurance in Schools:

All subject teachers engage with SQA Understanding Standards resources:

- Subject/level specific documentation from SQA
- SQA webinars on Understanding Standards
- SQA Academy online course on Quality Assurance of Estimates for 2020-21
- Professional Subject Groups (PSGs) support subject teachers
- Avenues of further support for teachers from SQA

Internal faculty practices for moderation, include:

- Agreed instruments of assessment
- Standard marking schemes and approaches
- Cross marking / peer-marking
- Sampling and marking verification

Faculties keep evidence that robust moderation procedures have been implemented.

Collaborative Working:

Collaborative working by teachers in quality assurance activities involving some, or all of the following:

- Professional Subject Groups (PSGs)
- The Self-Improving Schools Systems (TSISS) Partnerships
- Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Collaborative

Quality Assurance activities:

- Professional dialogue & support on shared understanding of standards
- Sharing of agreed instruments of assessment
- Standard marking schemes and approaches
- Cross marking / peer-marking
- Sampling and marking verification

Quality Assurance by the SQA:

- Each school across Scotland will be involved in sample quality assurance activity by SQA
- SQA will notify schools of subjects and levels to be sampled
- SQA will review samples of marked assessment evidence from a small number of candidates in each subject and level chosen
- SQA will provide feedback to the school on how the national standard has been applied
- This feedback is not a review of the provisional result a learner may receive.

Ellon Academy Senior Phase Suite of Support

- On-going teaching, support, help, feedback and advice via in-school lessons and Google Classroom
- Ellon Academy Senior Phase 'How to Study' Guide. This guide will be ready for pupils week beginning Monday 29.3.21.
- Senior Phase Google Classroom access over the Easter break. Google Classrooms will be populated with subject/course specific study support materials.
- S4/5/6 learners will be given support in school to plot their own study planner with assessment dates to enable them to organise their studies and preparation. Here is a link to the sample 'My Assessment/Study planner':

[Ellon Academy Community Campus](#)

Learner Conversations

- Learner conversations with Senior Phase learner's week beginning Mon 29.3.21, i.e.
 - General discussions with learners regarding where they are in their personal learning and next steps:
 - *On track to pass*
 - *On track for a good pass*
 - *"You're just about at a pass, but you're not quite there yet. Here's what you need to focus on..."*
 - Specific feedback and advice on what to focus on in preparation for the Assessment Block

Aberdeenshire Council will issue guidance for schools regarding how and when we can share provisional grades with learners.

As ever, our Guidance Team will be on hand to support all pupils in their House following Learner Conversations.

Also, the SQA have produced a booklet for senior pupils which can be accessed by following the link below:

[What you need to know for 2021 - National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher - SQA](#)

Copies of this booklet will arrive directly to your home prior to the Easter break.

Release of Provisional Results

We are awaiting guidance from Aberdeenshire Council regarding how and when we share pupils' provisional results.

Appeals 2021

A public consultation is on-going regarding Appeals for 2021. We will share the outcome of this consultation when it is published to ensure that parents/carers and pupils are aware of the process.

Summary

If you have any specific questions related to your son/daughter, please do not hesitate to contact the school via your child's Principal Teacher of Guidance and please be assured that we are working in the very best interests of our pupils and will support them as much as we can under these exceptionally challenging circumstances.

In partnership with you, we will support them through the duration of this most challenging time.

Yours sincerely,

Pauline Buchan

Pauline Buchan
Rector