

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

SESSION 2020 /21

PARAMETERS FOR THE MODIFICATION OF HIGHER NATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS.

This applies to the following qualifications:

- Skills for Work
- Awards
- National Progression Awards
- National Certificates
- Higher National Certificates/Diplomas (including Graded Units)
- Advanced Certificates/Diplomas
- Professional Development Awards

This also applies to centre-devised awards or clusters of freestanding national units.

JANUARY 2021

WHY ARE WE INTRODUCING ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT APPROACHES IN HIGHER NATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS?

As the country continues to suffer from the impact of the Coronavirus, the learning environment and social landscape have become increasingly challenging and there is significantly less opportunity for face-to-face delivery and assessment in Session 2020/21.

SQA must, therefore, consider what alternative assessment approaches can be made to Higher National and Vocational Qualification assessments to support greater opportunities for learning and teaching in session 2020/21, and reduce the burden of assessment whilst still retaining national standards.

As in all other years, the approach to awarding qualifications for 2020/21 must meet SQA's Principles of assessment and remain valid, reliable, practicable and fair in line with SQA's Code of Practice and Governing Principles (SQA, 2017).

The approach outlined here for Higher National and Vocational Qualifications aligns with the approach agreed for National Qualifications.

WHY DO WE NEED PARAMETERS?

Three core principles continue to be at the heart of all decision making for SQA qualifications. These are:

- ◆ Fairness to all learners.
- ◆ Safe and secure certification of qualifications, while following the latest public health advice.
- ◆ Maintaining the integrity and credibility of the qualification system, ensuring that standards are maintained over time, in the interests of learners.

In support of this, for all centres, in whatever circumstances, the first duty is to deliver high quality learning and teaching, and to assess candidates in a way that is valid, reliable, practical, equitable and fair. Guidance will be produced to support course teams in delivering this key duty in ways which uphold the integrity of qualifications, without unnecessary barriers, acknowledging the need to be flexible and responsive to conditions which remain unpredictable.

This document sets the current options for the alternative assessment of Higher National and Vocational Qualifications and identifies additional approaches to assessing key critical candidate evidence/competency relative to agreed Group Award aims.

Guidance will be provided to support the most effective ways for candidates to generate evidence of competence and for assessors, using professional judgement, where necessary and appropriate, to assess that evidence holistically relative to Group Award aims.

This document outlines:

- ◆ A Decision Tree approach for assessment of Group Awards.
- ◆ Approach to Group Award specific assessment templates to support these arrangements. (These arrangements can also be broadly applied to locally devised awards comprising clusters of freestanding units)
- ◆ A timeline for the development of these approaches (publication starting week commencing 1st February 2021)

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT OPTIONS FOR THE ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER NATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS?

From August 2020 to December 2020, additional alternative assessment support has been developed and provided to centres. The model agreed for session 2020-21 focussed on assessment and verification on the traditional unit basis with SQA supporting Centres to work flexibly in adapting conditions of assessment, where needed, and in combining assessment to reduce duplication, overlap and, wherever possible, to reduce the burden of assessment. In addition, SQA removed the requirement for completion of Higher National Graded Unit examinations and projects (with exceptions), thus affording staff and students, at this level, valuable additional time for learning, teaching and wider academic support.

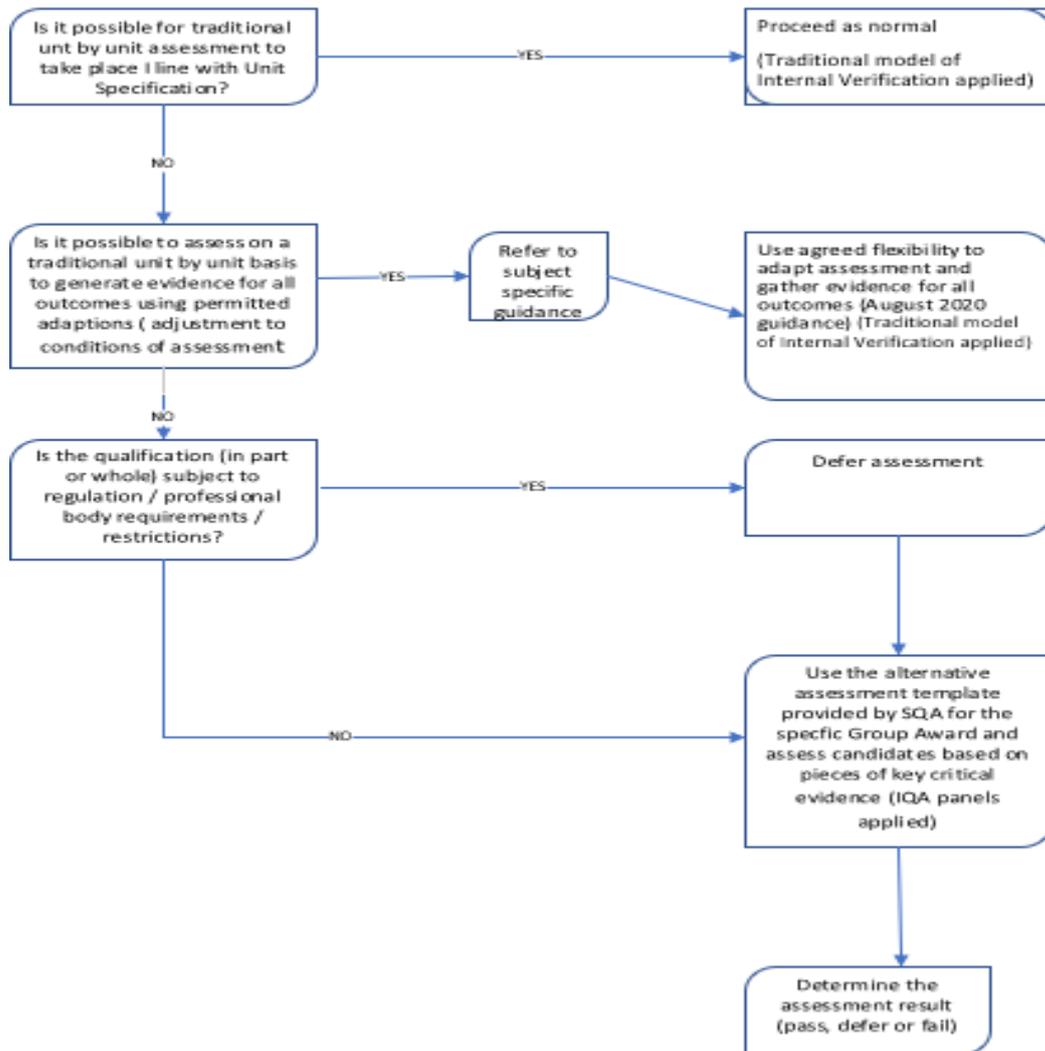
WHAT ARE THE FURTHER OPTIONS FOR THE ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER NATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS?

A Decision Tree has been developed to support centres in determining the appropriate route for assessment of the Group Award, using evidence based professional judgement. The decision tree can be found in the page below.

Additionally, Group Award specific assessment templates including the group award aims and identified key critical evidence / competencies will be provided by SQA, developed in partnership with Scotland's Colleges.

When considering arrangements for each learner or group of learners it is important that you follow the steps illustrated below. In the page below, the process of using the decision tree is outlined.

HNVQ ASSESSMENT DECISION TREE (COVID 19 SESSION 2020-21)



Initial consideration – can sufficient evidence be generated using the traditional unit by unit assessment model? Where this is the case, assessment should continue as normal and as per unit specifications.

Next consideration – where it is not considered possible to progress with assessment using the traditional unit by unit approach in line with Unit Specification requirements, course team should consider opportunities to use permitted adaptations in line with SQA's guidance published August 2020 (combining assessment, adaptations to conditions of assessment) and candidates should generate assessment evidence for all outcomes for all units with assessment judgements determined on this basis.

Next consideration – where conditions mean that a unit-by-unit assessment approach even with permitted adaptations cannot progress, the course team must consider:

- If the qualification is subject to regulation/professional body requirements
- Where this is the case, it will be necessary to defer assessment until conditions allow for this to take place.
- If the qualification is not subject to regulation/professional body requirements
- Where this is the case, the course team should use the alternative assessment template for the specific Group Award provided by SQA. The template identifies the course aims and the 'key critical competencies'. Note that even when this approach is invoked, Centres should continue to gather unit evidence where this is practical and within the public health advice to ensure as much group award coverage as possible.

WHAT ARE THE PARAMETERS FOR ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER NATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION?

Alternative Assessment approaches can be defined as approaches that continue to support the validity of Higher National and Vocational Qualifications, whilst mitigating the challenges of a reduction in programmed learning at college by reducing the overall assessment burden for a single year, rather than introducing wholesale change.

Where alternative approaches are offered, deliverers must consider the impact of those approaches on:

- ◆ Learning and teaching time.
- ◆ Centres' understanding of the assessable content.
- ◆ Validity, reliability, practicability, equity and fairness.