

SQA 2020-21 Frequently Asked Questions: Learners

We understand that you will have a range of questions relating to SQA arrangements this year. Below are answers to the most common questions that we have been asked. We hope that these will reassure you. If your question isn't covered here, please speak to your school.

Now that exams are not going ahead this summer, how will I be assessed?

The Scottish Government has now decided that N5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams will not go ahead this school session. This is due to continuing concerns about Covid-19 and also the need to ensure that there is fairness and equity for all of Scotland's young people who have been impacted as a result. Instead, your class teachers will provide the SQA with **provisional results** for you. This means they will tell the SQA what grade you should be awarded for each of your courses. Provisional results will be based on a range of evidence that you gather across each of your subjects this year.

How will teachers decide on my provisional results? Will work that I do in class and at home count towards them?

Provisional results will be based on a range of evidence that you gather across each of your subjects between now and the deadline when grades have to be submitted to SQA. Your school will give you as long as possible to gather the strongest possible evidence.

There is a West Lothian minimum agreed range of evidence for each subject at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher that teachers will base their provisional results for you on. This has been agreed across all of our secondary schools and is in line with SQA requirements.

The range of evidence will depend on the subject and how this is assessed. The SQA is clear that the evidence of most value will be:

- Normally gathered as late in the course as possible to give you the best chance to show the progress you have made (your school will design its assessment calendar to take account of this)
- Gathered using assessment that is of the same level of challenge as the SQA final assessment would be

- Evidence for some courses may be collected at a specific point earlier in the year because this is the best time to complete the assessment for you

If needed, for example if you need to be absent from school and miss assessments, your teachers may consider other types of evidence. There will be agreement across the teachers for each subject about this.

Will my teacher's provisional grade for me be the grade I get in August 2021?

Throughout learning, teachers will share with you how you are progressing, as they normally would. They will indicate to you at appropriate points what grade you would be expected to achieve based on the evidence you are gathering. This should mean that there are no surprises for you when your teachers confirm the provisional results that will be submitted to SQA for you. SQA will do some further checks once they receive your provisional results and may ask your school to provide some evidence that the school has used to decide on your provisional result. SQA will then make the final decision about your result. SQA has said they will not change any pupil's provisional result for a subject without seeing evidence from the school first.

We have missed out on learning time because of lockdown and not returning to school till August. Will this affect how well I do this year?

As long as you are engaged with your learning now, schools being closed up to August this year will not affect your results. SQA have made changes to N5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses to take account of this. For example, in PE you are assessed on one practical performance activity rather than two for N5. In other subjects, for example, you will have greater choice of topics that you can write about in assessments. It's important to remember that every school pupil in Scotland is in the same situation here and the SQA and your school will ensure that you are not disadvantaged.

Will I still sit prelims?

No. In line with SQA advice to schools, West Lothian schools will not be running a prelim diet as they normally would. There will instead be assessment windows in each West Lothian school where holistic assessment (in depth assessments that require you to bring together a range of knowledge, understanding and skills from across your learning) will happen within class time, usually in your normal teaching area. This is to increase time for learning and teaching so that you are as well prepared as possible for holistic assessments and to reduce the possible health risk of having large numbers of people coming together in an exam room.

What is a holistic assessment?

A holistic assessment is an assessment that requires you to apply knowledge, understanding and skills that you have developed over time, across the course, to

complete it. For example, it might be a practical performance in Music, or a Reading assessment in English, or a Design assignment in Design and Manufacture. A holistic assessment will be broader, more challenging and more in depth than, for example, a class test.

Holistic assessments may be designed by teachers in West Lothian or may be provided by SQA, depending on the subject. All schools are required to follow the West Lothian policy that has been developed regarding holistic assessments to ensure that these are **valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair**.

When and where will I do holistic assessments?

These will normally happen in your usual teaching area during class time. Your school will create its own calendar for these to ensure they are spread as much as possible and are manageable for you. In planning assessment calendars, schools will ensure that you are given as many opportunities as possible to demonstrate your achievement.

Depending on the subject and the type of holistic assessment you are doing, there may be certain rules that you will need to follow to ensure that the assessment is valid and secure. For example, if it is an unseen question paper, you will usually be required to leave your bag and phone in a secure place such as the front of the class. These would be normal procedures for SQA exams. Your school will follow the West Lothian policy on Holistic Assessments.

I'm doing Highers/Advanced Highers and we have only just been told in December that exams won't be going ahead. Will this affect how well I do this year?

No. In West Lothian we have been developing contingency plans for several months prior to the Scottish Government announcement on 8th December 2020 in case exams could not go ahead and were well prepared for this announcement. There is a West Lothian minimum agreed range of evidence for each subject at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher that teachers will base their provisional results for you on. This has been agreed across all of our secondary schools.

If there is anything else from SQA concerning Higher and Advanced Higher that you need to know for this year, your school will make sure that you have this information.

How long will I have to gather evidence towards my provisional results?

Your school will give as long as possible for you to gather evidence towards your provisional results. The SQA deadline for receiving provisional results from schools is 28th May 2021. Before this, they require each school and local authority to spend

time checking provisional results to make sure they are accurate so schools will need to set a deadline prior to 28th May for gathering of evidence from you. However, we know that it's likely that you will produce your best evidence near the end of the course and you will be given as much time as possible for this. Your school will have its own assessment calendar that will be shared with you, which will provide further details.

How do I know that my provisional results decided on by my school are fair?

It is very important that the process of deciding on your provisional results is fair and what we would call "robust". This means it is a strong and well planned system. Across West Lothian, we have developed agreement across each subject on the range of evidence that your teachers will gather and examine when deciding on your provisional results. Schools will also be involved in regular moderation within the school and with other schools during the year: this is the process of talking together about how they have assessed you and why they have given the grades they have. Provisional results will all be checked at a number of levels within your school and by West Lothian Council before they are confirmed to you and sent to SQA, to make sure they are a fair and accurate reflection of your achievements.

What if I'm ill or have to self isolate and miss an assessment?

Schools really understand that this may cause anxiety for you just now. Your school will have procedures in place to support anyone who is absent during the year, either because they are ill or because they have to self-isolate. The digital platforms that we are now using much more regularly in school (Teams and OneNote) will support you to keep in touch with your teacher, your class and your learning if you can't attend school for a period of time. Schools are also building flexible assessment calendars so that you will have the opportunity to sit any assessments that you might miss if you can't attend school.

What if my teacher is absent during the year because of illness or self-isolation?

Again, we understand that this might be a concern for you and your school will be well aware of this. They will have procedures in place to ensure that no one is disadvantaged by their teacher being absent. The digital platforms we are now using much more can be really helpful in supporting with this. Depending on the situation, this might include learning being set via Teams and OneNote, or another subject teacher in your school teaching your class for a period of time.

How will I manage my workload if I'm going to have lots of assessments for all my subjects?

Each school has developed its own assessment calendar based on agreements across West Lothian about the range of evidence needed for each subject. These calendars are flexible and are regularly discussed by your school. It is important to remember that schools want to support you and avoid unnecessary pressure on you. They will provide assessment calendars as far in advance as possible so that you can plan your workload.

How will I be prepared for Highers next year when I'm not sitting any exams in S4?

In the changes made to SQA qualifications at N5 this year, the SQA have taken account of learning that is needed to allow you to progress to Higher in that subject. The assessments that you sit in the classroom this year will be of the same level of challenge as the exams you would have sat for N5 and these will prepare you to be successful at Higher.

There are Covid restrictions in some of my subjects like Drama and Music. Will this affect my grade?

We know that this has caused significant concern, particularly since different Tiers of restriction across Scotland may mean that young people in one area of Scotland are facing restrictions that are not faced by young people in a different area. One example would be the wearing of face coverings in Senior Phase classrooms in Tier 3 and 4 areas or PE being entirely outside in a Tier 4 area. In the changes that SQA have already made to qualifications, they have considered restrictions relating to Covid-19. However, Scottish Government and Education Scotland are currently looking in more detail at the impact of these restrictions on your learning and will put in place further changes to ensure that you are not disadvantaged in the grade you achieve because of this.

I'm worried about whether my school will go into blended learning if the health situation is worse after Christmas. How can I gather evidence for my subjects?

At the moment, the Scottish Government has stressed that keeping schools open is the priority in current restrictions and that even in an area under Tier 4 restrictions, schools will remain open full time.

Should this change, your school has back up plans in place for your learning to continue based on the online platforms and systems developed during lockdown earlier this year.

I'm entitled to Special Arrangements for assessments and exams. How will I be supported now I'll be doing assessments in class?

You will be entitled to the same supports during a formal assessment in class as you would have in an SQA exam situation. Your school will discuss this with you and put supports in place.

Will my school still offer study support sessions this year?

We know that study support sessions are really valued by you and impact positively on your learning. With the current restrictions, most study support will now be online over Teams and schools have developed creative arrangements to ensure that you can still access this. If the health situation allows, face to face study support will continue to run in schools.

I'm having issues with accessing Teams/OneNote/a device eg a laptop. How can I get help with this?

Please speak to the relevant person in your school, most likely your class teacher or Head of House/Guidance teacher. There is a lot of support that schools can give to help you confidently use online platforms such as Teams and OneNote. If you need help with access to a device such as a laptop, please speak to your school as they will be keen to know and will probably be able to lend you a device to use.

If I don't think one or more of my provisional results is fair, can I appeal it?

We have not had details yet from SQA about the appeals system for this year. As soon as we know more, we will communicate this.

What will happen with study leave and timetable changes this year?

There will be no study leave as exams are not going ahead. We are in the process of developing plans across West Lothian for learning in May and June, once evidence gathering for this year's SQA qualifications is complete. Your school will confirm arrangements for the next stage in your learning as soon as these are agreed.