

17 November 2003

To: SQA Co-coordinator  
Secondary Schools and Colleges of Further Education

Action by Recipient	
	Response required
v	Note and pass on
	None – update/information only

Contact Name – Larry Cheyne at GLASGOW  
Direct Line – 0141 242 2334  
E-mail – [Larry.Cheyne@sqa.org.uk](mailto:Larry.Cheyne@sqa.org.uk)

Dear Colleague

### **National Qualifications Update – Contemporary Social Studies**

The contents of this letter should be passed to the member of staff responsible for Contemporary Social Subjects

#### **SQA Web-site**

This is the main source of information on National Qualifications in Contemporary Social Studies. It contains the current and 2002 reports of Principal Assessors and the Senior Moderator, and Arrangements documents. In spring 2004 SQA will add to the web-site a re-issue of the 1990 document “Guidance for Teachers” giving examples of evidence from candidates and marking instructions.

The address of the web-site is:

**[www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)**

On the home page, browsers are prompted as to their status (click “teacher” on the drop-down menu) and the subject (click “Contemporary Social Studies” on the drop-down menu).

Should you experience any difficulties accessing the web-site please contact:

Customer Contact Centre  
Scottish Qualifications Authority  
Hanover House  
24 Douglas Street  
Glasgow  
G2 7NQ

Tel: 0141-242 2214 or Fax: 0141-242 2244  
E-mail: [customer@sqa.org.uk](mailto:customer@sqa.org.uk)

#### **Update on the 2003 diet**

The Principal Assessor and the examining team are warmly thanked for their efforts in delivering a successful diet. The full report of the Principal Assessor on the 2003 diet of examinations is on the web-site ([www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)). This is an invaluable source of advice and

good practice. Centre staff are urged most strongly to avail themselves of the information contained there.

Following last year's slight increase, the shrinkage in entries continues at a similar level to previous years (20% drop between 2002 and 2003). The probable factors involved have been outlined in previous years. An assumed increase in presentations at Access level from the discrete Social Subjects may also be an additional factor contributing to the trend, even though presentation at Access level in CSS is also possible. Centres should be aware of this.

Cut-off scores were in line with the average for recent years and close to teachers' estimates. In view of the attempts made to make the paper more accessible, particularly at Foundation level, it was disappointing that we were not able to move closer to the a priori cut-offs.

As indicated above, the examining team continues to try to find ways of making the Foundation paper more accessible. The overall subject difficulty rating has eased in recent years. The use of cloze passages in 'summarising' questions and the inclusion of multiple-choice questions will continue at Foundation level. There is no doubt, however, that effective teaching can narrow the gap and some good responses were found from candidates who had been given summary sheets as part of their classroom revision. Another factor that impinged on awards this year was the relatively low estimates from centres, which had a depressing effect when combined with grades achieved in the examination.

### **Specimen Log Book**

A specimen log book has been posted on the web-site. It guides candidates through the process of investigating in a series of straightforward steps. It deals in turn with planning, and with locating and presenting evidence, and also contains an Investigating diary sheet. Centres may download and use this as they see fit.

### **Marking Standards**

The re-issue of the 1990 document "Guidance for Teachers", giving examples of evidence from candidates and marking instructions, is intended to give advice and reassurance to centres on assessing candidates work. As mentioned above, this will be re-issued in Spring 2004.

### **Markers**

SQA extends its grateful thanks to those who marked in the 2003 diet. The consensus is that marking for SQA is the best in-service training there is, from the point of view of becoming familiar with national standards and improving one's teaching.

Invitations to mark for the 2004 diet are currently being processed. While reserves exist at all levels, it is impossible to predict acceptance rates. Those wishing to become markers should complete an application form, which are available on-line or from Trudy Thomson in our Appointments section on 0131 561 6825.

### **Appeals**

In a reversal of the recent trend, there was a significant and welcome reduction in the level of appeals at all levels. It is most important that centres exercise discrimination in selecting candidates for whom an appeal is to be made.

Another important aspect in estimating is that the assessment should be unseen to the candidate. Best practice is to devise a fresh assessment, possibly using some amended versions of items from a range of past papers,

Further advice is contained in previous newsletters. The 2002 version is on the web-site.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Larry Cheyne". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Larry Cheyne  
Qualifications Manager