

17 November 2003

To: SQA Co-ordinator
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

Dear Colleague

National Qualifications Update – History

The contents of this letter should be passed to the member of staff responsible for History.

SQA Web-site

This is the main source of information on National Qualifications in History. It contains the current and 2002 annual reports by the Principal Assessors and the Senior Moderator, Arrangements documents (including Access 3 Social Subjects) and Specimen Papers, marking instructions for the 2003 diet and various statistical information including pass rates. For example, a comparison with other subjects indicates that History has the largest uptake amongst the social subjects at all levels.

The address of the web-site is:

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 “History” on the drop-down menu).

Also on the secure section of the web-site are current NABs. These can be down-loaded by your SQA co-ordinator. A large number of revised NABs have been added recently onto the website.

Review of National Qualifications

Most of the original recommendations have been addressed. The alignment of internal and external assessments at Intermediate 2 and Advanced Higher is proceeding through the issue of revised NABs (see below). It is intended to undertake a similar exercise for Intermediate 1 in time for issue next August. A survey of the uptake of the various options within periods has been done for the new NQ levels and the results are currently under consideration.

A further activity has been an examination of the number of components in the external assessment of a subject. The normal maximum is two, whereas Higher History has three. Likewise History at Intermediate 2 has one component more than the other major social subjects. In addition to the overwhelming support for the Extended Essay/Response expressed in last year’s National Consultation, further evidence has been gathered from candidates and

centre managers. The report resulting from this consultation will be submitted to the National Qualifications Management Group in the near future with a view to deciding how to progress this.

Update on the 2003 diet

Principal Assessors and their examining teams are warmly thanked for their efforts in delivering a successful diet. The full reports of the Principal Assessors on the 2003 diet of examinations are on the web-site (www.sqa.org.uk). These are an invaluable source of advice and good practice. Centre staff are urged most strongly to avail themselves of the information contained there.

Centres are reminded that all areas of the syllabus may be sampled. Likewise there are no areas that will be examined every year. Further points to bear in mind for each level are:

Standard Grade

The National Rating (pre-appeal) was 0.01 (virtually the ideal), indicating that, overall, candidates were awarded in line with their attainment in the other subjects they entered. In addition, the cut-off scores were moved slightly closer to the a priori scores.

From 2005, the source evaluation item in Unit 1 at ES Credit will cover only one source, not two as at present. This item has not worked well; in addition this may help to reduce cut-off scores at that level/element.

Centres are reminded that from 2004 the 8 mark KU item at Credit will require an introduction and conclusion. This will align more closely expectations with those at Intermediate 2 and prepare candidates better to progress to Higher. It will also differentiate better between better prepared candidates and others. The instruction will be worded:

(Note: for this answer you should write a short essay of several paragraphs, including an introduction and a conclusion.)

Candidates will be able to gain up to six marks via the usual combination of points and developed points, with a further two marks available for responses satisfying the rubric of the item.

Further helpful advice is contained in the report by the Principal Assessor on the web-site.

It is also intended to approach the National Qualifications Management Group in December with a view to removing Context 2A (International Cooperation and Conflict 1790s – 1820s) from the 2006 diet onwards. This context has not been attempted consciously by any candidate since 1990, as far as is known. Any centre likely to be disadvantaged by this proposal should communicate this immediately to the above contact point.

Intermediate 1

The National Rating (pre-appeal) was 0.52, marginally above the acceptable limit, indicating that awards were too generous in comparison with what candidates achieved elsewhere. In the longer term this may be addressed by making the sources more challenging, and the allocation of an extra mark per context from 2005 onwards may help, but in the short term it may be necessary to raise cut-off scores slightly.

Intermediate 2

The National Rating (pre-appeal) was 0.04 (virtually the ideal). The examination worked well, with the major cause of concern the number of unsatisfactory titles for the Extended Response; these usually resulted in candidate failures. Further helpful advice on this and other matters is contained in the report by the Principal Assessor on the web-site.

Higher

The National Rating (pre-appeal) was 0.09, again, near the ideal. A small improvement in average scores in Paper 2, possibly due to the inclusion of prompts for the first time, was balanced by a decline in Paper 1. The Extended Essay, as previously, produced by far the best scores and had a component pass rate of over 80%. Even so, a number of Essays were submitted with titles which did not aid the candidates. Further helpful advice on this and other matters is contained in the report of the Principal Assessor on the web-site.

Centres should also note the conditions specified for the production of the Extended Essay as contained in the Arrangements for the course. Any reported cases of malpractice will be followed up.

Advanced Higher

The National Rating (pre-appeal) was -0.26 – indicative of a tendency towards challenge although well within acceptable limits. The examining team will continue to monitor standards through the central marking process. The main issues were the poor quality of a significant number of dissertations, the operation of the word count penalty and the place of historiography. Further helpful advice on these and other matters is contained in the report by the Principal Assessor on the web-site.

To aid centres in interpreting national standards, a number of annotated candidate responses are being put on the web-site. The first one on the German context is already on the web-site; others will be placed as soon as they are available.

Moderation

The report of the Senior Moderator is on the web-site. It gives clear and helpful advice on the moderation process and associated outcomes this year.

The National Assessment Bank

As indicated above, most of the revised versions of the Intermediate 2 and Advanced Higher NABs are available. With the exception of three Intermediate 2 contexts, where there were problems of quality and delivery, the first versions were issued also in hard copy. Future issues of NABs will be available electronically only. These and current NABs are on the secure section of the SQA web-site and can be downloaded only by SQA co-ordinators. Further details are available from:

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

Centres should note that these NABs are designed to be used for making holistic assessments. A candidate achieving half marks (or more) in aggregate is deemed to have passed that unit; centres may continue to assess by using outcomes and PC should they so wish. In addition, at Intermediate 2, the 8 mark short essay item need only be tackled in whichever context is chosen as the Optional Unit.

Marking Instructions

Marking instructions for the papers at Intermediate 1 and 2, Higher and Advanced Higher are on the web-site. These have been posted as part of a rolling programme that will cover other subjects and levels. Centre staff can download these.

Also available are marking instructions, along with the relevant past papers, for Standard Grade (General and Credit), Intermediate 2 and Higher, for periods of four or five years. These are marketed by Leckie and Leckie as, for example, "Official SQA Past Papers 2000-2003 with Answers", and are on sale to the public at a cost of £6.99. Leckie and Leckie can be contacted on 01334 475656 or by e-mail at enquiries@leckieandleckie.co.uk.

On-line Marking Project: Understanding Standards

In furtherance of the wider dissemination of national standards, SQA is establishing an on-line project to enable centre staff to practise marking sample scripts from the 2003 diet and receive feedback as they attempt the scripts. Up to ten scripts will be available for assessment. Initially the project will cover Standard Grade and Intermediate 2 and Higher levels. It is intended that this project goes live by Christmas 2003.

You can contact the project team by email at understanding.standards@sqa.org.uk or call 0131 271 6744 or 0141 242 2255 during office hours.

Further means of improving training for markers are also being investigated.

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.

We also are anxious to recruit specialist markers at Advanced Higher for the central marking events (May 7 – 9 for the Dissertations and June 11 – 13 for the scripts). Presentation in the chosen Field(s) is essential.

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.

It is also important that candidates be entered at the appropriate level, as this is one of the major factors that trigger appeals. For example, centres may be well advised to enter at General/Credit only those candidates estimated at Grade 3 or better for both elements.

Accurate estimating is another key element. The instrument(s) of assessment should be of equivalent demand to the external examination, in terms of coverage and sampling of the syllabus, the types and balance of items, marks allocations and time allowed.

Marking should be in line with national standards, and appropriate cut-off scores used. Cut-off scores for 2002 and 2003 are contained in the Principal Assessors' reports on the web-site. The candidate should also demonstrate attainment clearly. There is little margin for error where an appeal is based on, say, a preliminary examination where the candidate scored 50%.

Another important aspect in estimating is that the assessment should be unseen to the candidate. With the publication of marking schemes to cover past papers, the use of these can not be sustained, certainly not in their entirety. Best practice is to devise a fresh assessment, possibly using some amended versions of items from a range of past papers, to use the latest version of a commercially produced paper (though SQA can not endorse the validity thereof) or to use NABs (suitably amended where appropriate) alone or in combination, as NABs should have been kept secure.

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 and is positioned centrally below the "Yours faithfully" text.

Larry Cheyne
Qualifications Manager