

01 December 2004

To: SQA Co-ordinator (Secondary Schools
and Colleges of Further Education)
Directors of Education
SCIS
Customer Account Managers

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

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Dear Colleague

National Qualifications Update — History

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

SQA Website

This is the main source of information on National Qualifications in History. It contains the current and 2003 annual reports by the Principal Assessors and the Senior Moderator, Arrangements documents (including Access 3 Social Subjects) and Specimen Papers.

The address of the website 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 then click “GO”).

Also on the secure section of the website are current NABs. These can be downloaded by your SQA Co-ordinator.

Review of National Qualifications

Most of the original recommendations have been addressed. The alignment of internal and external assessments at Intermediate 1 is complete with the issue of revised NABs. Centres are reminded that the question paper total in 2005 will be 45. A further survey of the uptake of the various options within periods is being done for all NQ levels and the results will receive further consideration.

The review of external assessment components for Intermediate 2 and Higher History has been completed. The Extended Essay and the Extended Response will be retained.

Update on the 2004 diet

Again 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 2004 diet of examinations are on the website (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 therein.

There were common issues that appeared across levels in the 2004 diet.

a) Coverage of the syllabus

Centres are again reminded that all areas of a syllabus may be sampled in an external examination. Likewise there are no areas that will be examined every year. For example, centres teaching only the Liberal Reforms and the extension of democracy in the Later Modern Scottish and British section at Higher severely disadvantaged their candidates; likewise centres teaching only the rise of the Nazis and the Nazis in power in the Germany section would run a similar risk. At Standard Grade and Intermediate there are no content options within the contexts chosen for study; therefore the whole of each chosen context should be covered. At Advanced Higher, sources in Part 2 of the examination may be drawn from any part of the content; however it is recognised that this is quite demanding and an investigation into means of rationalising this is under way (see below).

b) Word count

At Advanced Higher a significant number of candidates incurred a penalty of five marks for an over-long dissertation. The Arrangements are unambiguous and centres are urged to warn candidates that there is no leeway in this. Candidates will sign up actively for the word count stated and for acceptance of any penalty incurred for words over the limit of 4,000.

At Higher and Intermediate 2 penalties will be imposed where the word limits on plans are exceeded by any amount. Centres should also note that the word count on plans for the Extended Essay and Response refers to *bona fide* words and dates. Attempts to circumvent this by use of codes, pictograms, text language, abbreviations and maps will be penalised. Likewise the Essay/Response must be written up (not typed, unless special arrangements have been made with SQA), under controlled conditions in a single period of time. Mind maps/spider diagrams will be accepted for the time being (on condition that they are used as a method of organising the words).

Particular points worth noting about each level are:

Standard Grade

The pattern of awards showed a pleasing spread. In addition, the cut-off scores moved very close to the a priori scores, indicating that the examination is now at an appropriate standard. The National Rating (pre-appeal) was 0.02 (virtually the ideal), indicating that, overall, candidates were awarded in line with their attainment in the other qualifications they sat.

Knowledge and Understanding items at Credit that required candidates to select relevant evidence from recall worked well. One example is the item on the economic terms of Versailles. Such discriminators will feature in future examinations.

The 8 mark KU item at Credit requiring an introduction and conclusion was done well. Candidates were 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.

Performance in source evaluation items was disappointing, particularly at Foundation where candidates still tend to evaluate sources solely in terms on content. Performance in source comparison items tended to vary by centre, with some cohorts not making developed comparisons.

Centres are reminded that from the 2005 examination, the source evaluation item in Unit 1 at ES Credit will cover only one source, not two as at present.

Intermediate 1

The National Rating (pre-appeal) was 0.07, indicating a satisfactory pattern and level of awards. Cut-off scores were close to the a priori scores, indicating the level of challenge was appropriate. The number of candidates gaining no award was relatively high, possibly due to some migration of candidates from Foundation level. Centres are urged to enter candidates at an appropriate level.

Intermediate 2

Entries were up again, with some high-achieving cohorts of S4 entries. The National Rating (pre-appeal) was -0.22, down on last year. The examination worked well in the main with some difficulty caused by taxing sources in some source comparison items; cut-off scores were reduced to take account of this. One major cause of concern again was the number of unsatisfactory titles for the Extended Response; these usually resulted in candidate failures. Also of concern was that some candidates made no attempt to answer some "Describe" items.

Higher

The National Rating (pre-appeal) was 0.07, again near the ideal. The level of awards is, overall, very much in line with that gained elsewhere by the cohort. While the share of A passes may be lower than in some subjects, the A – C pass rate is relatively high. 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. Centres should ponder that the evidence suggests that abler candidates are relatively disadvantaged by group/class titles. Paper 1 continues to present candidates with challenges which some meet with prepared, but not always appropriate, answers; timed essay practices with unseen titles may be one means of addressing this. Also, to ensure adequate coverage of the syllabus, it is recommended that centres study at least three topics for each part of Paper 1. A small decline in average scores in Paper 2, possibly due to an unexpectedly challenging source in the Appeasement topic, led to a reduction in cut-off scores.

Advanced Higher

Many candidates produced work of very high quality. The main issues were again the poor quality of a significant number of dissertations and the penalty for exceeding the word count (4% of candidates merited penalties), as well as the coverage of syllabus by the sources in some important fields. This is being addressed currently by the setting team and the Assessment Panel, with a view to defining course content more explicitly and highlighting areas from which source items are to be drawn for 2006/07.

The wording of single source items is also under review. For 2005 the wordings will be:

“How useful/valuable is Source X” with the intention of focusing on a high profile primary source, which would put a premium on the provenance and historical context of the source, as well as on content and recall, and

“How fully does Source Y” (or an equivalent wording), usually based on a secondary source, focusing on the content of the source, recall and any debate.

In the two source item, provenance comments will not be credited unless directly relevant to the evaluation.

It is intended to put sample answers on the website. In addition, a revised list of dissertation titles has been prepared and will be issued in May 2005.

Centres should also note that the evidence suggests that entering a cohort for multiple Fields works strongly against candidate achievement.

Moderation

The report of the Senior Moderator is on the website. It gives clear and helpful advice on the moderation process and associated outcomes this year. It is worth highlighting the benefits of cross-marking borderline scripts.

All centres should now be using the revised NABs. Assessments based on older versions will not be accepted in 2005.

The National Assessment Bank

The revised versions of the Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2 and Advanced Higher NABs are available on the secure section of SQA's website and can be downloaded 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.

Release of Component Marks

From 2005 all National Qualifications with more than one component will have the marks for these components issued to centres in August. Any queries arising should be addressed in the first instance to the Customer Contact Centre (see above).

Marking Instructions

Marking instructions for Higher and Advanced Higher for 2004 are on the website. These have been posted as part of a rolling programme that covers other subjects and levels.

Markers

SQA extends its grateful thanks to those who marked in the 2004 diet. There is consensus 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 2005 diet are currently being processed. While reserves exist at all levels, it is impossible to predict acceptance rates of markers. We are particularly anxious to recruit specialist markers for the German Field at Advanced Higher for the central marking events (May 13 – 15 for the Dissertations and June 3 – 5 for the scripts); presentation in the Field is essential. Those wishing to become markers at any level should complete an application form, which is available online or from Trudy Thomson in our Appointments section on 0131-561 6712.

Appeals

In a continuation of the last year's trend, there was a further reduction in the level of appeals at all levels. It is gratifying that centres exercised discrimination in selecting candidates for whom an appeal was made. It is hoped this trend will continue. Centres should examine whether, at Standard Grade, a successful appeal in one element will alter the overall award.

Fuller advice on appeals and estimates is contained in last year's newsletter.

Access 3 Social Subjects

A separate newsletter updates centres on this area and is already on the website. Further details can be obtained from Veronica Curran (e-mail: veronica.curran@sqa.org.uk; telephone: 0141-242 2332).

If you wish further clarification of any points in this letter, please contact either Veronica Curran or myself.

Yours faithfully



Larry Cheyne
Qualifications Manager

