

8 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

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Dear Colleague

National Qualifications Update – Modern Studies

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

SQA Web-site

This is the main source of information on National Qualifications in Modern Studies. It contains the current and 2002 reports of 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.

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 “Modern Studies” 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.

Review of National Qualifications

The original subject report is on the web-site. All the recommendations have been addressed and implemented, with the exception of Action 7: Discontinuity between Intermediate and Higher. The Assessment Panel and other interested bodies have been working on a set of proposals to address this and improve syllabus articulation. These proposals are being costed and will be presented to the National Qualifications Management Group in December for approval. Further details will be given in due course.

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 0.00 (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 closer to the a priori scores.

The operation of the GRC was sharpened at Credit (Enquiry Skills) in relation to selectivity in the use of facts. To quote the Principal Assessor report:

In questions asking candidates to identify selective use of facts 1 (c), 3 (c), the strongest candidates were able to identify selectivity rather than just identifying where the person stating a view was 'wrong'. At Credit Level candidates are expected to identify how the person has been selective in the use of facts rather than just where they are 'wrong'.

In 2004, to clarify the task for candidates, the wording for such an item will be, "To what extent has X been selective in his/her use of facts?"

Intermediate 1 and 2

The National Ratings (pre-appeal) were 0.26 and 0.06 respectively, indicating awards, particularly at Intermediate 2, were roughly in line with elsewhere. Concerns remain over candidates' performance in LO1 items, particularly in the International Issues section, where the deployment of knowledge and understanding is less fulsome than might be wished.

Higher

The National Rating (pre-appeal) was 0.10, close to the ideal. The main issue highlighted in the report of the Principal Assessor was a disappointing performance in Social Issues items in Paper 1, and concern that this may be related to the lowering of evidence requirements for Unit D344 12. Fuller details are on the web-site.

Advanced Higher

The National Rating (pre-appeal) was 0.26, showing awards were marginally generous but well within acceptable limits. A major improvement in candidate performance was noted; a greater use of the full marks range did mean that cut-off scores were raised. The major issues to emerge relate to the dissertation. One was the inability of some candidates to remain within the word limit, either signing up for a total over – sometimes well over – the limit, or signing for a total that was patently inaccurate. Such candidates lost 10% of the available marks for the dissertation, as stated in the Arrangements and elsewhere. The other issue concerns the planning of the dissertation; a poor plan leads almost inevitably to a poor dissertation, and a poor dissertation to failure to gain an award.

Further helpful advice is contained in the Principal Assessors' Reports on the web-site.

Moderation

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

The National Assessment Bank

One new NAB for Advanced Higher was issued in August in hard copy. Also two new pairs of DMEs, with evaluating questions in an appendix, were issued to centres in hard copy in August. Note that “Social Issues in the United Kingdom D344 12/NAB001” replaces the February 2001 version, which should be discarded. “Social Issues in the United Kingdom D344 12/NAB004” is a new NAB. A fifth NAB containing two further DMEs is in preparation. Also in preparation is a new NAB for Intermediate 2 for each unit.

Future issues of NABs will contain only one set of assessments, which will make the numbering of assessments simpler. These will be available electronically only. These and current NABs will be 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

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) 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.

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. Where revised interpretations of marking guidelines occur, as at Standard Grade in 2003, then the cut-off scores appropriate to that style of marking should be used. Those not familiar with the style adopted at Standard Grade Credit markers' meeting, for example, would be well advised to use the 2002 cut-offs. 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. This applies also to Decision Making Exercises; the recent issue of new DME NABs covers this problem.

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 above the typed name and title.

Larry Cheyne
Qualifications Manager