

17 November 2005

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's website

The subject page is the main source of information on National Qualifications in History. It contains the current and past reports of Principal Assessors and the Senior Moderator, Course Specifications/Arrangements documents (including Access 3 Social Subjects) and specimen question papers, previous National Qualifications Updates and marking instructions for all levels for the 2005 and recent diets.

The address of the website is: **www.sqa.org.uk**.

On the homepage browser, select 'History' from the NQ subject drop-down menu, then click 'GO'.

Plans for the Extended Response and Extended Essay

From the 2006 diet onwards, plans for these components can only be downloaded from SQA's website. (Please note — Flyleafs for the submission of candidates' Extended Response and Extended Essay will be sent in February, as normal.)

Review of National Qualifications: Uptake of options

Another survey of uptake at NQ levels was conducted in November 2004. The results were discussed at the spring meeting of the History Assessment Panel and the recommendations agreed by the National Qualifications Management Group.

At the next revision of Courses the following contexts will be dropped:

- a) 'The Norman Conquest' at Higher, Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2

- b) 'War, Death and Revolt' at Intermediate 1 and 2
- c) 'Tea and Freedom' and the 'French Revolution' at Intermediate 1
- d) 'New Worlds' at Intermediate 1 and 2
- e) 'Louis XIV' at Advanced Higher

At Advanced Higher a watching brief will be kept on the other smaller fields (3, 5, 9 and 11). Each of these make a significant contribution to the breadth of cultural experience available to candidates, but is expensive in terms of the resources devoted to small numbers of candidates.

Update on the 2005 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 are on our 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 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

Knowledge and understanding items increasingly separated the well prepared candidates from those who did not possess, or who were unable to recall, sufficient evidence to satisfy the demands required of them. Candidates at Credit level continued to demonstrate improved performance in most Enquiry Skills items. At Foundation level in particular, however, ES1 items continue to be done poorly. To address this at Foundation level there will be a recognition ES1 item in the 2007 diet. At Credit level, candidates are awarded a mark if they allude to a source being primary/secondary but don't use the actual phrase 'it is a primary/secondary source'. For an ES5 response it is good practice, but not a requirement, to state which source the selected evidence comes from.

Intermediate 1 and 2

At Intermediate 2 particularly, the improvement in awards at the upper end reflected the change in the candidature, with many high achieving candidates from local authority and private schools alike. Poorly worded titles for the Extended Response were the biggest cause of poor performance there. Teachers/lecturers should also ensure that the issue is part of the Intermediate syllabus as candidates can only be credited for material within the syllabus. Centres should note that from 2006 candidates are not required to write their sub-headings on the front page of the plan; this has added little value in the past. For source evaluation items at Intermediate 2, the same marking convention applies as at Credit level.

Higher

The general performance was slightly better to that in 2004. Mean scores in all three elements were higher than last year, with a marginal increase in Paper 1, though remaining significantly below the scores attained in 2002 and 2003, and larger rises in Paper 2 and in the Extended Essay, where it reached the highest level to date. Paper 1 continues to present candidates with challenges which some meet with prepared, but not always appropriate, answers. Candidates should answer the question set.

Poorly worded titles for the Extended Essay were the biggest cause of poor performance. However, for the Extended Essay some centres were presenting candidates with the same essay title, and in some instances, candidates produced the same introduction/conclusion. Centres should note that the Extended Essay is an individual piece of research; class essays bring the Extended Essay into disrepute and threaten its validity.

Candidates were not disadvantaged by the omission of a direct Scottish question in the later modern period in Paper 1. Historically only a small minority of candidates have answered such questions. Nevertheless there is a significant issue about the place of Scottish history within this option at Higher and SQA welcomes submissions that address this.

Advanced Higher

There was a slight fall in entry numbers compared to last year, but this was more than compensated for by an enormous improvement in the ability of the candidates sitting the examination. There were clear signs that this cohort had been extremely well prepared in examination technique. Grids to support the marking process were developed by the team and these will be available on the subject page of our website. Few candidates lost marks for an over-long dissertation. Candidates sign up actively for the word count stated and for acceptance of any penalty incurred for words over the limit of 4,000. A revised list of dissertation titles is on the subject page of our website.

Further helpful advice on each level is contained in the Principal Assessors Reports on our website.

Moderation

The report of the Senior Moderator will be posted on our website in due course. It gives clear and helpful advice on the moderation process. Centres should also indicate clearly which NAB is being used. Likewise, centres should endeavour to use the latest version of any NAB available at the time of testing (see below). It is also helpful if centres/candidates date the evidence when it is produced.

The National Assessment Bank

New NABs are issued in electronic form only 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

Release of Component Marks

In August 2005 the marks for all National Qualifications were issued to centres. Any queries arising should be addressed in the first instance to the Customer Contact Centre (see above).

Markers

SQA is again grateful to those who marked in the 2005 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. This is particularly the case at the newer levels of Intermediate and Advanced Higher.

Invitations to mark for the 2006 diet are currently being processed. While reserves exist at all levels, it is impossible to predict acceptance rates by markers. Those wishing to become markers should complete an application form, which is available from our website, or from Trudy Thomson in our Appointments section on 0131-561 6712 (or e-mail: trudy.thomson@sqa.org.uk).

Appeals

All queries on appeals should be addressed to the Appeals Helpline at: appeals@sqa.org.uk. While advice on appeals has been given in SQA documentation to centres and in previous subject newsletters, centres should note that the most robust centre evidence will show demonstrated attainment (as opposed to predicted) in an assessment of equivalent demand to the Course assessment, in terms of:

- ◆ coverage of syllabus: this should be as wide and deep as the external examination
- ◆ time allowed: this should be equivalent, and ideally on the same day
- ◆ marks allocation(s)
- ◆ types and balance of items
- ◆ level of demand of items individually and collectively
- ◆ the use of cut-off scores appropriate to the assessment instrument used
- ◆ marking scheme
- ◆ standard of marking
- ◆ degree of security: the external examination is unseen to candidates

Centre evidence which does not meet these criteria may be accepted at a discount or rejected. Commercially produced papers are deemed secure for the year of their production only but the onus to ensure their validity, in terms of the first five points above, rests with centres. It is also recommended that candidate evidence should bear the date of its production.

Centres should also note that the examination scripts are also re-evaluated as necessary. Whole or partial upgrades to the centre estimate may also be made on that basis. Hence even if a centre's evidence is rejected as invalid or unreliable, some candidates may receive a full or partial upgrade on the basis of a revisiting of the script.

History at Access 3

SQA is investigating possible provision of an award at Access 3 in History. The business case for this will have to be established and approval sought from the Scottish Executive and from the National Qualifications Steering Group. Further information is on the subject page of our website.

If you wish further clarification of any points in this letter, please contact either Veronica Curran (0141-242 2332) or myself at the above address.

Yours faithfully



Larry Cheyne
Qualifications Manager