

2 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 — Modern Studies

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

SQA's Website

The dedicated NQ subject page is the main source of information on National Qualifications in Modern Studies. 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 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.

From the home page, select 'Modern Studies' from the NQ subject drop-down menu, then press the 'GO' button.

Review of National Qualifications

The first examinations under the new Arrangements will take place in summer 2007. There will be no dual running of the examination or the Course. Existing Units for all levels will remain current until 31 July 2007. In terms of Unit passes this means:

- ◆ candidates who have completed any Units of the existing Higher and Intermediate Courses can contribute these to awards in the new Courses
- ◆ centres should give candidates who have passed the existing external examination the opportunity to pass any existing outstanding Unit(s) in session 2006/07

The new Course Specifications will be launched at a series of events around the country in November, as follows:

| Date (November) | Location | Venue |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| Tuesday 1 | Bellshill | Strathclyde Hilton |
| Wednesday 2 | Ayr (Racecourse) | Western House Hotel |
| Wednesday 9 | Dundee | Dundee Hilton |
| Thursday 10 | Aberdeen | Aberdeen Conference Centre |
| Friday 11 | Inverness | Thistle Hotel |
| Thursday 17 | Edinburgh | Murrayfield |
| Friday 25 | Glasgow | Moat House |

There are still places at all these venues, though the Glasgow one is nearly full. Delegates are limited to one per centre. Those interested should contact Lianne Wilson in our Events Team on telephone: 0141-242 2085, or by e-mail: lianne.wilson@sqa.org.uk.

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 on the 2005 diet of examinations will be, by the end of November, 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

While entries fell slightly, both the numbers and the proportion of Credit awards rose, reflecting good practice in most centres. There is some concern over poor performance at KU at General, and in some parts of Syllabus Area 4. Both parts of Syllabus Area 4, ‘Alliances and Security’ and ‘The Politics of Aid’, will be integrated into all three papers from 2007. This will have the effect of evening out the relative degrees of difficulty in SA 4 across the three papers.

To keep the Foundation paper accessible, the setting team will continue to use both the format of filling in the blanks, although the number of alternatives may well be increased, and also that of providing a cartoon or pictorial evidence for extended writing knowledge and understanding questions. Candidates should, therefore, be made well aware of these styles of questions.

In Enquiry Skills, it is strongly recommended that centres re-emphasise to candidates that an overall conclusion on the extent to which there has been selective use of facts is essential if full marks are to be achieved.

Intermediate 1 and 2

Candidates should be made familiar with the format of the question papers. At Intermediate 1 there continues to be a high proportion of rubric violations and candidates appearing to choose the wrong study theme to answer. At Intermediate 2, centres should

continue to stress the importance of time management. The change in mark allocation to LO1 questions should also be noted and pointed out to candidates. Candidates should be advised that there may be four questions in one study theme rather than only three as previously. Centres should note this change when producing prelim examinations.

Centres should also ensure that the level of entry is appropriate for each candidate. The relatively high proportions of 'No Awards' is of concern.

Higher

Centres are commended on the good performance of candidates overall. Some concerns remain where centres use out of date exemplification, particularly in the themes relating to South Africa and the United States of America. Paper 1 continues to present candidates with challenges which some meet with prepared, but not always appropriate, answers. Candidates should answer the question set.

Advanced Higher

Last year's improvement in candidate performance was maintained. 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 5,000. 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 on our website by the end of November. 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 Coordinators. Further details are available from:

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

Telephone: 0845 279 1000, or Fax: 0141-242 2244

E-mail: customer@sqa.org.uk

Release of Component Marks

In 2005 the marks for all National Qualifications with more than one component were issued to centres in August. 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, telephone: 0131-561 6712, or e-mail: trudy.thomson@sqa.org.uk.

Understanding Standards: Online Marking Project

In furtherance of the wider dissemination of national standards, SQA has established an online project to enable centre staff to practise marking sample scripts from the 2004 diet and receive feedback as they attempt the scripts. Up to ten scripts will be available for marking.

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.

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.

Modern Studies at Access 3

SQA is investigating possible provision of awards at Access 3 in Modern Studies. The business case for this would have to be established and approval sought from the Scottish Executive and from the National Qualifications Steering Group.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Cheyne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L' and 'C'.

Larry Cheyne
Qualifications Manager