

11 November 2004

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

**For the attention of all staff responsible for the
delivery of National Qualifications in Modern
Studies**

Action by Recipient	
	Response required
✓	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 — Modern Studies

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

SQA Website

This is the main source of information on National Qualifications in Modern Studies. It contains the current and 2003 reports of Principal Assessors and the Senior Moderator, Arrangements documents (including Access 3 Social Subjects) and Specimen Papers, marking instructions for all levels for the 2003 diet and for Advanced Higher for 2004.

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

On the home page, users are prompted to select their status (eg click 'Teacher' on the drop-down menu and then click 'GO') and the subject (click 'Modern Studies' on the drop-down menu and 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

The returns from the National Consultation held in the summer on articulation between Higher and the Intermediate Courses have been summarised, and considered by the Modern Studies Assessment Panel. They have also been approved in principle by SQA's National Qualifications Management Group. Before the revisions are released finally, they will be considered and refined by a Modern Studies focus group in December. It is intended that as well as examining syllabus articulation this group will address the clarification of content in expanded descriptors. Centres will be updated as soon as possible thereafter.

Update on the 2004 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 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 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 0.09 (close to the ideal), indicating that, overall, candidates were awarded in line with their attainment in the other qualifications they sat. The cut-off scores were moved closer to the a priori scores; the operation of the selectivity of use of facts items at Credit, as signalled last year, worked well.

While entries fell slightly, both the numbers and the proportion of Credit awards rose, reflecting good practice in most centres. Some centres may wish to consider updating the exemplification they use in relation to the Scottish Parliament, government policies supporting the unemployed, and the security interests of European powers in the new century, eg in the war against terrorism or in Iraq.

Intermediate 1 and 2

The National Ratings (pre-appeal) were 0.01 and -0.1 respectively, again indicating awards were roughly in line with elsewhere. Concerns remain over candidates' performance in LO1 items, particularly in the International Issues section.

At Intermediate 1 particularly, candidates who do not complete the paper are unlikely to pass.

At Intermediate 2, questions which require candidates to give explanations seem more demanding than questions which require descriptions. Many candidates were unable to distinguish between the two types of questions and therefore did not answer this type of question in the way intended.

Higher

The National Rating (pre-appeal) was again 0.10, close to the ideal. Cut-off scores were restored to 2002 levels, reflecting a more accessible examination this year. 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. Similarly, candidates ought to be aware of the role of committees in the Scottish Parliament and, indeed, of the roles of MSPs and the First Minister, as well as the method used to elect the Parliament. Paper 1 continues to present candidates with challenges which some meet with prepared, but not always appropriate, answers. Centres should refer closely to the Arrangements when preparing candidates for the external assessment.

Advanced Higher

The National Rating (pre-appeal) was 0.22, showing awards were marginally generous but well within acceptable limits. Last year's improvement in candidate performance was maintained. However, eight per cent of candidates lost four marks for an over-long dissertation. The Arrangements are unambiguous and centres are urged to warn candidates that there is no leeway in this. From 2005 candidates will sign up actively for the word count stated and for acceptance of any penalty incurred for words over the limit of 5,000.

The same grade boundaries were used as in 2003. This reflects a paper perceived as similar in challenge to the previous one, but where the items in the first half of the Research Methods section have a fair degree of predictability. The National Rating of the subject/level in 2003 moved into the middle of the positive range, providing another reason for not reducing the cut-off scores to the a priori levels. Such considerations also stand against any notion of introducing further choice in the essay section. Such a change would make the examination more accessible.

Further helpful advice is contained in the Principal Assessors' Reports on the website.

Moderation

The report of the Senior Moderator is on the website. It gives clear and helpful advice on the moderation process. The major concern this year was that centres, when teaching the Political or International Issues Units, teach only one study theme, rather than the two required by the Arrangements. This year one third of the centres sampled failed moderation initially and this was a common reason.

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

The issue of fresh NABs is proceeding apace at Intermediate 2, Higher and Advanced Higher and new NABs were published this month. SQA Co-ordinators are informed of any fresh issues. New NABs are issued in electronic form only on the secure section of SQA's website 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
Fax: 0141-242 2244
E-mail: customer@sqa.org.uk

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 Advanced Higher are on the website as part of a rolling programme. It is intended that marking instructions for each NQ Course will be published for two years out of any four; Higher Modern Studies is planned for inclusion again next year.

Markers

SQA is again grateful to those who marked in the 2004 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. This is particularly the case at the newer levels of Intermediate and Advanced Higher.

Invitations to mark for the 2005 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 online or from Trudy Thomson in our Appointments section on 0131-561 6712.

Understanding Standards:

a) Online Marking Project

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 marking. Initially the project will cover Higher level and extend to other levels in the future. It is intended that this project goes live by Christmas 2004.

b) Continuous Professional Development Event

It is planned to hold a CPD event looking at means of improving performance at Higher in session 2005/06, possibly in the autumn term.

Appeals

In a continuation of the last year's trend, there was a further reduction in the number 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.

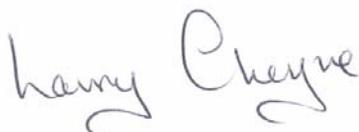
Fuller advice on appeals and estimates is contained in last year's newsletter.

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