

March 2009

To: SQA Co-ordinators
(secondary schools and
colleges of further education)
Directors of Education
SCIS
Customer Account Managers

Action by Recipient	
	Response required
✓	Note and pass on
	Note — update/information only

Contact: Stan da Prato
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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.

Understanding Standards website

The Understanding Standards website (www.understandingstandards.org.uk) now has examples of candidate responses, with marks awarded and comments by the examiners, for all 2008 Higher Paper 1 and Paper 2 examination questions.

Examination diet

Centres are reminded that all areas of the syllabus may be sampled. There are no areas that will be examined every year. Centres should bear this in mind when preparing candidates.

Further points are:

Advanced Higher

2009 sees the first exam of the revised Course. The revised Arrangements along with the specimen question paper and its associated marking instructions and Course Assessment specification are posted on the subject page of SQA's website (www.sqa.org.uk). Three National Assessment Bank items are available via SQA Co-ordinators.

A paper containing advice to centres on how to improve performance at Advanced Higher is available on SQA's website. A revised list of Dissertation titles has also been published.

Higher

Two documents giving advice on delivering Higher are available on SQA's website.

The stem 'To what extent...' was not used in the 2008 Paper 1. It will be used in the 2009 Paper and thereafter. More advice on question stems is available in the advice document *Improving Performance in Higher— Essay Questions: Preparing Candidates, Setting and Assessing*.

When answering the evaluating questions in Paper 2 candidates should quote the relevant statements **in full**. Candidates should also note that evaluating questions that ask 'To what extent...' for 3 marks will require a balanced answer as the statement is likely to be partly correct but partly incorrect. Half marks are no longer awarded in the Higher examination in either paper.

Intermediate

Advice on improving performance at Intermediate is available on SQA's website.

Standard Grade

The Russian option (Syllabus Area 3B) has been discontinued and will not appear in the 2009 examination or thereafter.

Estimates, Absentee and Appeals

The updated *Guidance on Estimates, Absentees and Assessment* for the 2009 diet is available on SQA's website.

Evidence should as far as possible replicate SQA's question papers. Where split prelims are used the difficulty level should be adjusted, the most straightforward method being by raising the cut-off scores. Prelim papers should also carry a date. The use of past papers or specimen question papers in their entirety is not acceptable for Appeals purposes. A selection from at least three such papers is recommended. Sections should not be lifted *en bloc* from these papers. When using past papers as part of their revision, candidates should only use papers that are of the same format as the current examination — for example the 2006 Higher paper should not be used as the exam was revised in 2007.

Centres are reminded that SQA does not validate commercially produced prelim papers. Centres should satisfy themselves that the papers are valid and reliable. If necessary questions and cut-off scores should be modified.

At Advanced Higher, the overall estimate should include evidence from the dissertation. This should be based on the candidate's progress up to the date of the overall estimate.

Learning and Teaching materials

Support materials are commissioned by LTScotland. All comments and queries regarding support materials should be addressed directly to them (tel: 08700 100 297, or e-mail: enquiries@LTScotland.org.uk).

If you wish further clarification of any points in this letter, please contact either Duncan Cox (duncan.cox@sqa.org.uk) or myself at the above address.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stanley da Prato". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the word "Prato".

Stan da Prato
Qualifications Manager