

September 2008

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
Direct line: 0845 213 5500
E-mail: stan.daprato@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's website

The 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 Verifier, Course Specifications/Arrangements documents (including Access 3 Social Subjects) and specimen papers, previous National Qualifications updates and marking instructions for the 2008 and recent diets. The address of the website is **www.sqa.org.uk**. From the homepage select National Qualifications, then 'Modern Studies' on the drop-down menu, then select 'GO'.

Course materials checklists

These summary guides to the location and purpose of essential Course documentation have been updated. They are the first port of call for any subject queries.

Learning and Teaching materials

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

Update on the 2008 diet

Principal Assessors and their examining teams are thanked for their efforts in delivering a successful diet. The full reports of the Principal Assessors, now known as the External Assessment reports, will shortly appear on our website. These are an invaluable source of advice and good practice. Centre staff are urged to make use of the information contained there.

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 to bear in mind for each level are:

Advanced Higher

Session 2008/09 sees the introduction 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 the website. Three National Assessment Bank items are available via SQA Co-ordinators.

Flyleaves and notes for the submission of candidate's Dissertations are now available only via SQA Co-ordinators. When centres wish confirmation of the validity of titles not on this list, such proposals must be submitted to the Scottish Qualifications Authority via the Dissertation mail-box (**dissertation@sqa.org.uk**) by 1 November. If you have any queries relating to Dissertation topic titles please contact: Maureen McLeod (tel: 0131-271 6752, or e-mail: **maureen.mcleod@sqa.org.uk**).

A paper containing advice to centres on how to improve performance at Advanced Higher is now available on SQA's website. This is a distillation of advice in previous PA reports with additional tips and hints. A revised list of Dissertation titles has also been published.

Marked answers used in the Understanding Standards event on 30 September 2008 will shortly be made available on the Understanding Standards website (**www.understandingstandards.org.uk**).

Higher

Results were again very encouraging, with several candidates again attaining full marks. To support centres we are revising the Understanding Standards website and will provide examples of marked answers to all the questions in the 2008 exam paper. Two documents giving advice on delivering Higher are also available on the website.

The stem 'To what extent... ' was not used in the 2008 Paper 1. It will be used in the 2009 Paper and thereafter.

The Modern Studies Assessment Panel has recommended that the reference to five topics be removed from the Course Arrangements. This is likely to take effect

from 2009/10. Centres will, of course, be able to teach a fifth topic if they wish their candidates to have a choice of questions in Paper 1.

Intermediate

There was a marked improvement in the overall attainment of candidates at Intermediate 2. Advice on improving performance at Intermediate is available on the website. Centres should note the comments in the External Assessment report about time management by candidates.

Standard Grade

The quality of response from candidates across all three papers was most encouraging. Changes in question styles have improved candidate responses at General level. Some candidates fail to reach adequate conclusions in enquiry skill questions especially at Credit level.

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

Access 3

Three NABs are now available for each of the Study Themes developed in the Cluster award at Access 3 Modern Studies. (See also under 'Verification' below.)

SQA will automatically award an Access 3 Course to candidates who have failed the external assessment of the corresponding Course at Intermediate 1 but have met the Unit requirements of the Intermediate 1 Course. This applies to Modern Studies as the current component Units at Intermediate 1 and Access 3 are hierarchical.

To be eligible for this award of an Access 3, candidates must meet the following criteria:

- ◆ passes in all the required internally-assessed Units at Intermediate 1
- ◆ a result of 8 or 9 for the Intermediate 1 external assessment
- ◆ all Unit passes under the revised Arrangements; passes obtained prior to 2007 are not eligible

Verification (formerly Moderation)

The report of the Senior Verifier is available from the subject page of SQA's website. It gives clear and helpful advice on the verification process. Centres should indicate clearly which NAB is being used. It is also helpful if centres/candidates date the evidence when it is produced.

Centres should use the latest version of any NAB available at the time of assessment. For revised or new qualifications, centres should use complete fresh NABs for re-assessments, rather than allowing candidates to amend a previous effort. Hence, fresh assessments should be used at all levels.

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
The Optima Building
58 Robertson Street
Glasgow, G2 8DQ

Tel: 0845 279 1000, or fax: 0845 213 5000

E-mail: **customer@sqa.org.uk**

Markers

SQA is again grateful to those who marked in the 2008 diet. It is generally recognised that marking for SQA is excellent in-service, and can be a major factor in promoting improved performance in individual centres.

Invitations to mark for the 2009 diet will shortly be issued. 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 to download from our website or from Evelyn Dorans in our Appointments section on 0131-561 6709 (or **evelyn.dorans@sqa.org.uk**).

Estimates and Appeals

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

Centres should note the advice given where split prelims are administered. The difficulty level should be adjusted accordingly, the most straightforward method being by raising the cut-off scores. Centres should also indicate on each part of a candidate's evidence the date on which it was produced. 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.

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.

All queries on appeals should be addressed to the Appeals Helpline at **appeals@sqa.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. I look

forward to meeting many Modern Studies teachers at the MSA conference on 1 November 2008.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stanley da Prato". The signature is written in a cursive style, with "Stanley" and "Prato" being more legible than "da". A large, sweeping underline stroke is drawn under the entire signature.

Stan da Prato
Qualifications Manager