

4 November 2003

To: SQA Co-ordinators
Directors of Education
ASC
SCIS
SFEU
Scottish Executive
Principal Assessors

Action by Recipient	
	Response required
✓	Note and pass on
	None – update/information only

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Dear Colleague

Note of guidance for centres on the use of commercially produced question papers

As promised in my letter of 13 February 2003, I am writing to update you on the progress in developing further guidance on the use of commercial question papers. In my previous letter I told you of a working group, comprising SQA officers, producers of commercial question papers and stakeholders, set up to conduct a review of the use of commercially produced question papers in generating evidence for assessment appeals. The group has now completed its work and I am pleased to inform you of its outcomes.

The group focused their discussions on the security, reliability and validity of commercially produced question papers. The definitions for these can be found in the guidance issued to all centres in February 2002 *Notes of guidance for centres on the appeals process and on the preparation of evidence to support estimates and appeals*.

1 Outcomes from the working group

i) Security of papers

A number of producers of commercial question papers agreed to develop, publish and adhere to a common Code of Practice designed to enhance the security of their papers. The Code of Practice, amongst other things, provides consistent advice to centres on such important matters as confidentiality and storage. You should receive details about this from your producer — if you don't, please ask them.

Centres still retain ultimate responsibility for the security of their question papers and other assessment materials. It is your responsibility to ensure that candidates have not had improper access to those materials before formal use. We accept evidence for appeals and other assessment purposes on the understanding that you can guarantee that it is the work of the candidate and that there has been no improper access.

ii) Reliability and validity of papers

Consultation confirmed that producers make considerable effort to adhere to Course requirements with regard to reliability and validity. However, this is not a guarantee that these question papers meet all course requirements. It was agreed at the Principal Assessors' conference in 2003 that SQA should not prior moderate commercially produced question papers and that examining teams should retain the right to decide on validity and reliability of individual papers.

This means that, as with security of papers, you have ultimate responsibility for the reliability and validity of the assessment evidence you send us to support assessment appeals.

iii) Use of commercial question papers

Centres may continue to use commercially produced question papers provided that our guidance on security, validity and reliability is adhered to. However, **only the current year's commercial papers** may be accepted in total. Papers considered to be in the public domain cannot be used for appeals purposes.

Past year's commercial question papers should be used in the same way as past SQA papers. No past papers, including SQA papers, will be accepted in their entirety as evidence for appeal purposes.

Further advice and guidance on these aspects can be found in the publication *Guidance on generating evidence for National Course estimates and assessment appeals* issued to all presenting centres in February 2001.

2 Further action

i) Assessment specifications

To assist centres wishing to develop question papers, SQA will start to produce assessment specifications. These will help centres to understand the structure and balance of the external question papers. When SQA revises Courses, an assessment specification will accompany the specimen question paper.

As part of the NQ Review, SQA will be revising courses for implementation in 2004/05 and will publish assessment specifications and specimen question papers for these Courses in 2004. Assessment specifications will be produced for other Courses as we publish subject exemplification material.

ii) Revision and consolidation of guidance on appeals evidence

We will, over the course of the next few months, revise and consolidate our guidance on the evidence requirements for assessment appeals into a single document.

I trust that the above clarifies the position with regard to the use of commercially produced question papers and on our plans to improve guidance on producing evidence for assessment appeals.

If you have questions on any of the above, please speak with your Customer Account Manager.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Drake". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'T'.

Tom Drake
Acting Director of Qualifications