



National Qualifications 2013
Internal Assessment Report
Access 3 Social Subjects

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in National Qualifications in this subject.

National Courses

Titles/levels of National Courses verified:

Access 3 Social Subjects

General comments

The general standard of work was appropriate to Access 3 and there were several excellent examples of candidates working independently and providing a very satisfactory standard of response.

In most cases, presenting centres had applied national standards appropriately and the results were able to be Accepted, albeit after re-submission in a number of instances (see below, Course Arrangements).

Course Arrangements, Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Most presenting centres were clearly familiar with the Arrangements and constructed their Courses appropriately. There were no instances this year of centres using key ideas which were not current. The requirement to use at least four different sources seemed to be well understood, with most centres using a variety of text, DVD, booklets, and in several instances, primary sources by way of survey, visit or interview.

The submissions which were Not Accepted at initial verification (20%) reflected a failure to submit sufficient evidence of Course completion or of the assessment instrument rather than a failure by schools to meet Unit specifications or by candidates to demonstrate sufficient attainment. This is an improvement on last year, when the figure was 25%.

Evidence Requirements

From the above, it is clear that there is still a problem for some presenting centres in understanding the Unit Evidence Requirements. It is less clear as to why this should be the case. The following advice was issued from SQA to presenting centres last year.

Centres should ensure that they are using the current Arrangements (Fourth edition, published March 2006). Centres should note that the 'Candidate folio' (see p.21 of the Arrangements) refers to the work undertaken by the candidate during the Course and is distinct from the assessment end-product. There should be evidence of coursework submitted for each candidate. In order to minimise 'Not Accepted' decisions, centres should consult last year's Internal Assessment Report (available on the Access 3 Social Subjects page of the SQA website) for further guidance prior to submitting pupils' work.

Most presenting centres submit jotter or booklet work as the Course evidence. Where the work leading up to a presentation is in the form of rough work — mind maps, outline plans, teacher feedback etc, centres should not be embarrassed about submitting this, as it is precisely this kind of evidence that tracks the process and progress of the exercise.

It is perhaps worth repeating that there should be evidence in the coursework that the four stated sources of information have been used.

Administration of assessments

The use of the assessment template provided by SQA is not mandatory, but it is recommended. These templates were revised in 2006 with the intention of obviating some of the more frequent reasons for submissions being Not Accepted. It should ensure that it is clear to the Verifier which four sources of information are being used, which decisions are being made, which contrasts are being given, etc.

All submissions this year made use of these assessment templates, but the occasional submission is still using the old assessment template. Centres would be advised to use the revised template. There were no problems this year in accepting the given sources as valid.

Candidates should be encouraged to write full answers. It is nigh impossible, for example, to state a conclusion and give the reasoning for that in just a line or two of writing.

Although Access 3 is pitched at a very basic level, there is still a need for rigour in marking the responses. If a contrast is being made, it cannot be made by describing just one of the entities being compared. A decision should not just be a repetition of the main thing the candidate learned about a given key idea.

In a small number of cases there was evidence of some slipshod marking of the assessment and of the acceptance of some work that was sub-standard. It was also clear from other submissions that cross-marking had taken place prior to forwarding for verification. This is good practice and is to be commended.

In a small number of submissions, the question of identical responses from candidates remains an issue. In most cases, however, it was clear that responses had clearly been formulated by the candidates, even when they were dealing with very similar territory. Generally, the more background or comment given by the teacher in charge, the easier it is to confirm the centre's judgement, especially in cases where submissions are very similar.

Background information, supplied by the teacher, can help, as the Verifier will be looking for evidence of some kind of independent working from the candidate. It may be that the teacher in charge has had to tightly structure a decision-making exercise, perhaps with multiple choice options, which may have led to identical responses. A commentary on this and perhaps the inclusion of the exercise which produced the identical responses would be advantageous and would

obviate any suspicion that the candidates were simply copying out conclusions given by the teacher – a circumstance which would have to result in a Not Accepted verdict.

In the best submissions, it is clear that candidates have been encouraged to formulate their submissions in their own words, as far as possible, avoiding wholesale lifts from sources. (See also comments on identically-worded submissions in reports from 2005 to 2012.)

Areas of good practice

Background comment from the presenting centre on aspects of the assessment has been commended above. Sometimes it is not easy for the Verifier to identify from the coursework exactly where the coverage of the required concepts lies, or perhaps where the 'Contrasts' are being made. Some centres include a Course outline identifying this for the Verifier. Others include an outline of the Unit, detailing key ideas, sources and answers that candidates might be expected to give. This is helpful and commended.

The more information that presenting centres provide about the Course, the circumstances of the NAB, the materials provided for the pupils, the reasons for candidates failing to gain a pass etc, the easier it is for the Verifier to accept the centre's results. The inclusion from some centres of an assessment feedback sheet provided for the candidates was helpful and is commended. Increasingly, centres are including additional information such as that exemplified above and this is greatly appreciated.

Many centres are meticulous in the detail they provide and this is welcomed and commended. Centres which provide inadequate information can find that their final results are delayed and that they have to provide the additional information before verification can proceed. This can affect some candidates' chances of passing (see below — 'Delayed verification').

Verifiers have commented positively on the variety of presentational techniques in evidence in the submissions — graphs of various forms, posters, maps, PowerPoint presentations (both in printed-off form and on memory stick) etc, as well as evidence of cross-curricular links being embedded in the Units. Likewise, they recognised the considerable effort that had evidently been put into designing many of the courses, the attempts to make the Course materials appropriate to the level and the inclusion of outside visits or visiting speakers in several instances.

Specific areas for improvement

Delayed verification

Any delay in the verification process can result in failure for some candidates, even if the majority eventually passes, subsequent to re-submission of the evidence. This can occur where the candidates themselves are required to make

amendments to the submission. As the exam season approaches, or gets under way, many Access 3 candidates can be elusive.

If the Access 3 presentation group is small, as is often the case, a handful of absent candidates in a resubmitted bundle, left as a 'Pass' by the presenting centre, could provoke an unacceptable degree of discrepancy between the centre results and the Verifier, resulting in a Not Accepted decision for the whole group. In these circumstances, the wisest course is to withdraw the absent candidates prior to re-submission.

Verification is timetabled to allow for a return of materials to presenting centres for amendment and re-submission where necessary whilst pupils are still in schools. (This year central verification took place on 4 April). Late submissions which miss central verification will inevitably be subject to delay, which may make it very difficult for centres to gather additional evidence or make amendments. This emphasises the need for the teacher in charge to ensure that he/she is familiar with the demands of the Course and that all the necessary evidence is supplied for verification at the first time of asking. (Likewise, this applies to the inclusion of pro-forma and staff signatures.)

Retention of evidence

It is absolutely essential that coursework accumulated during the Course is retained by the teacher in charge and safely held against the possibility of being called in for verification. It is not possible to accord an Accepted verdict in the absence of coursework, regardless of the apparent standards evidenced by the assessments (see 'Evidence Requirements', above).

Appropriateness of content

Contexts from the general area of crime and drug culture are sometimes used as a hook to capture the interest of the Access 3 learners. There is nothing to object to in this, but it can lead to the exploration of difficult territory and there is a need to exercise care in the sources used. Last year, Verifiers expressed reservations as to the suitability of the article 'Armed and Hooded thug tries to Rape Student' being used with young people of this age range. There were no such problems this year.

PowerPoint submissions

It has been made clear in previous reports that submissions are welcomed in a wide variety of format. We are happy to work from disks or memory sticks, but most centres tend to print off the material and this is probably easier to handle. Teachers should ensure that maps and pictures which are integral to the submission are actually displayed in the print-off. Some of this year's submissions had large blanks due to 'Quicktime and TIFF decompressor being needed to see this picture'!