

Our ref: Modern Studies Update 2002

04 November 2002

To: SQA Co-ordinator
Secondary Schools and FE Colleges

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

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Dear Colleague

Modern Studies – Update Newsletter, 2002

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

Reports of Principal Assessors and Senior Moderator

The full reports are on the SQA web-site (www.sqa.org.uk). Feedback is summarised below. The National Rating (pre-appeal) compares results for candidates in one subject with results in all subjects they entered; the ideal is zero, indicating an appropriate range of awards.

Standard Grade (National Rating – 0.04)

Entries have largely stabilised, as have awards. Some candidates are entered for inappropriate levels. A small minority of F/G candidates scored virtually full marks in the General paper - they would have been better to have been entered for G/C. A worrying development was a number of candidates entered for Credit Level only. This is a risky strategy on the part of centres as there is no guarantee of which topics will appear at Credit Level in any given year. Centres that assume Politics of Aid and Europe will alternate between General and Credit should be aware that this is not necessarily the case.

Knowledge and Understanding of the Scottish Parliament was very disappointing. Candidates should be able to use terminology appropriate to representation and participation in the context of the Scottish Parliament. Candidates should be aware of specific Scottish examples to include in their answers.

04 November 2002

Centres should ensure that candidates are briefed on different types of KU question. In contrast to ES questions where candidates are clearly aware of the different sub-elements, in KU questions many candidates do not discriminate between describe-type questions and explain-type questions. They often give descriptive answers to all KU questions.

The purpose of the change in format in Question 2(c) was to avoid candidates copying out large amounts of information from the sources in the mistaken hope that they were drawing conclusions. Many candidates produced shorter but more sharply focussed answers. All candidates should be briefed to read the instructions fully before answering this type of question.

Candidates should be clear about definitions of 'political', 'social' and 'economic' factors / rights.

Questions in Syllabus Area 4 deal with the security interests of European countries. Centres should be aware the questions could focus on security interests of European countries both within and beyond the boundaries of Europe.

When asked to identify selective use of facts / bias / exaggeration, candidates must make specific reference to the view given. They must explicitly link the view to the source material.

Intermediate (NR Int 1 0.35, Int 2 0.09)

General points

Candidates need to be made aware of the difference between 'Describe' and 'Explain' type Outcome 1 questions. Too many candidates give descriptive answers to questions that ask for explanation. In 'Describe' questions there was a tendency for candidates to provide list-type answers rather than developing points.

Candidates who have not studied Standard Grade should be made fully aware of the 3 different types of source-based questions.

When asked to identify selective use of facts / bias / exaggeration, candidates must make specific reference to the view given. They must explicitly link the view to the source material.

Examples and contexts taught should be up-to-date. There was some evidence of out-dated information, particularly in Section C. Answers about South Africa frequently referred to the Apartheid period.

Candidates should be briefed about time management. There was some evidence of candidates running out of time in Section C although the problem was not as marked as in 2000 and 2001.

Centres should be aware that a number of candidates are entered for Intermediate 2 who are more suited to Intermediate 1.

04 November 2002

Intermediate 2 only

Outcome 1 questions ask for 'detail'. Many candidates are unable to give the depth and range of detail and exemplification required for high marks.

In the Decision Making Activity Questions for Section B some centres encourage candidates to use the same structure as they would in a Higher DME. The use of a style appropriate to a report is to be commended but centres should be aware that the typical structure of headings used at Higher does not necessarily apply to Intermediate 2. Candidates should devise their headings after reading the question.

Candidates should be clear about the difference between 'economic', 'social' and 'political' issues.

Questions 6(c), 7(c), 8(c) and 9(c) provided candidates with a series of prompts. Candidates should be familiarised with this style of question and encouraged to plan their answers around the prompts provided.

Higher (NR 0.27)

Paper 1: The examination papers are prepared well in advance of the day on which they are taken, therefore questions on specific recent events or constitutional changes will not appear. The need to update information does involve extra research work for Modern Studies teachers but 'twas ever thus. The integrity of the subject and the examination requires candidates to have reasonably current information. Candidates are not penalised for not having today's news as exemplification but major changes should be noted. Issues such as the McIntosh Commission and the Sutherland Report have to be addressed especially when they have been circulating for some time. There are excellent textbooks but candidates cannot rely on these totally, particularly when there is a time lapse between their writing and publication.

The vast majority of candidates use essay style. Centres should emphasise that numbering and bullet points are not acceptable in Paper 1.

'Conclusions' continue to be a problem. Many candidates try to give a conclusion in LO1 – difficult, if not impossible, in descriptive answers. In LO2, candidates are confusing 'conclusion' with 'summary' and repeat what they have already written. In LO2, many conclusions can be integral to an answer.

The entire syllabus is there to be examined and this may mean questions on what may seem 'obscure' parts of the syllabus.

04 November 2002

Paper 2: Most candidates use a style appropriate to a report. It may be a useful device to train candidates to start the report with a separate section on containing background and a certain amount of generic information is acceptable but candidates must try to make sure that some of it is specific to the subject matter of the report. The best candidates:

- ◆ respond to all of the instructions in the remit
- ◆ use a report style and format, such as a memo
- ◆ give a summary of the task and a clear recommendation at the start
- ◆ use all the source material
- ◆ synthesise the material from the sources
- ◆ give clear evidence of background knowledge, integrated into the report
- ◆ respond to criticisms of their recommendations, with supporting evidence
- ◆ give a clear conclusion at the end, with a summary of the arguments and evidence

Advanced Higher (NR 0.02)

Dissertation

It is seldom a good idea for candidates from the same school to do the same question.

Each candidate should:

- ◆ set clear aims that relate to the individual question/ hypothesis
- ◆ directly use information collected for the dissertation to support the arguments that are made
- ◆ analyse the information that is collected
- ◆ ensure the conclusions answer the question/hypothesis
- ◆ indicate the sample size, date and time of any primary research undertaken
- ◆ use any information included in the appendices of the dissertation to support the arguments that are being made.

Examination

Candidates must try to relate all the arguments to the particular question, include a balanced answer when completing essays and be more critical of the information they are using. It is not always quantity but quality that is required.

The National Rating (pre-appeal) is .002, near the ideal of zero, indicating that for the subject/level the results are as would be expected over the nation. Continuity in the examination team has ensured continuity of standards, but the weighting of the dissertation was lessened and that may have some impact. The most important single factor is probably the increase in numbers – while the pass rate may cause some concern, the actual number of candidates receiving awards has risen markedly over the last three years candidates gained 352 awards, A-C, in CSYS in 1999 (post appeal) and 420 awards, A-C, in 2002 (pre-appeal).

04 November 2002

Senior Moderator' Report

- ◆ The standard of assessment in almost all cases was near or at the required standard.
- ◆ Centres which send in evidence for moderation should identify unambiguously the items that have been applied.
- ◆ Past, Specimen and commercially-produced papers are invalid substitutes for National Assessment Bank items.
- ◆ Centres should not use withdrawn N.A.B. items.
- ◆ Centres are reminded of the conditions under which assessments are administered in terms of timing and confidentiality.
- ◆ Proportionate timing must apply to the delivery of 'split' N.A.B. items.
- ◆ Centres should seek advice from the Moderation Unit if clarification of instructions is required.
- ◆ Retrospective moderation takes place in early autumn.
- ◆ Advanced Higher N.A.B. D348.13 has been redesigned.
- ◆ Centres should be alert to the fact that some N.A.B. items may require to be updated, particularly in regard to marking instructions.

National Assessment Bank

Further NABs are in preparation for Social Issues at Higher. These will consist only of Decision Making Exercises, as per the findings of the NQ Review.

It is emphasised most strongly that NAB materials must be kept secure. Under no circumstances should they be used in commercial revision classes, or distributed to candidates/students outwith controlled assessment conditions.

Appeals

Advice on evidence for appeals was issued in last year's circular. In sum, while other evidence is considered in support of an appeal, the most robust evidence is an unseen assessment, mirroring the demands of the external examination. A preliminary examination fits this requirement admirably. Candidate evidence should be accompanied by the instrument(s) of assessment and the associated marking instructions and cut-off scores used.

This has particular implications for Modern Studies in relation to the Decision Making Exercise. The examination team has been sympathetic to the use of past papers for this area alone; the publication of past papers, along with marking instructions, has put some of these in the public domain, and it is difficult to see how this dispensation can be sustained after this session. It is intended that the new DME NABs will fill this gap from August 2003, and hence the importance of keeping NAB materials confidential.

Where NABs are used as evidence for other areas, they should be edited to the format of the external assessment.

Centres are reminded that appeal results are final.

04 November 2002

Markers

There is widespread consensus that becoming a marker for SQA is amongst the best forms of in-service training there is, and provides a unique insight into the application of national standards. Entry figures for 2003 are far from final, but some vacancies may exist at G/C level at Standard Grade, and for both papers at Higher (though we aim to fill these with experienced G/C markers). Those interested, with three years' presentation experience in the subject, should contact Catherine Inglis in our Appointments Section (direct line: 0131 561 6865) for an application pack. These packs were also distributed to centres.

SQA is most grateful to its present markers and to its other appointees, especially examining teams, for their efforts in securing the success of the 2002 examination diet.

Review of National Qualifications

As intimated in the NQ Review update in June 2002, all short- and medium- term recommendations have been implemented. Investigation has confirmed that no further reductions in internal assessment are possible.

A consultant has been briefed to investigate syllabus discontinuity between the Intermediate and Higher courses, and the Assessment Panel will consider the issue at its Spring meeting.

Yours faithfully



Larry Cheyne
Qualifications Manager