

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

History

Qualification area

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
Included in this report**

History — Advanced Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	893
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	861
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

There was a slight fall in entry numbers compared to last year, but this was more than compensated for by an enormous improvement in the ability of the candidates sitting the examination. There were clear signs that this cohort had been far better prepared in examination technique. Past PA Reports have emphasised how to teach for this examination, and how to best prepare candidates in the required answer techniques. Effective teaching and learning strategies and methods now reflect this.

There seems to be much more evidence of several very welcome factors:

- (a) Centres that have already gained a reputation for success are entering larger numbers, and these centres which 'know how to do it' are now confidently preparing their candidates at the right level.
- (b) Many more centres are seeing this as a 'taught course' where the advanced techniques required, in both source and essay answering and in preparing dissertations at the right level, are being effectively taught. The days of the single, untaught candidate seem numbered. The poor results these candidates typically achieved is now finally showing through in the fact that they are now far less frequently being entered.

There is, too, increasing realisation of the unmanageability of multiple presentations across two or more fields of study from a single teaching set.

What is coming through is that there is more 'pre-selection' being done in centres as to whether the candidate is likely to make the grade.

It became clearer to Markers that this year the candidature was both able and well prepared. They knew what they had to do in the dissertations, and came into the written examination properly prepared to deliver their best. The result of this was that the distribution of the results across the marks spectrum made a welcome shift upwards, as more candidates showed their improved ability this year. Last year there was a quarter who fell just short of the pass mark. This year's 'equivalent' group showed much better technique and confidence in gaining marks, and most now climbed into the lower pass zone, while the far higher number of really able candidates impressed with their excellence. The examining team is unanimous in its congratulation of so many centres in all fields for preparing candidates at a level where the majority reached a standard that ranged from good to excellent.

It is gratifying to report that this year there were three candidates who gained 100%. This is a testimony to the exceptional level of response that young people are able to provide, and a witness to the fact that History Markers do credit highly when they have work that is deserving of the highest marks.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 140	-	-	-	-
A	30.4	30.4	262	98
B	28.3	58.8	244	84
C	28.1	86.9	242	70
D	7.5	94.4	65	63
No award	5.6	100.0	48	-

General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

Comments on any significant changes in distribution of awards/grade boundaries

Grade boundaries are based on the aggregate mark gained from both the dissertation and script. With no issues arising from the question paper in terms of degree of difficulty, the cut-off scores reverted to the a priori scores.

All the evidence suggested a very able cohort had been entered for this year's examination. In every way, the majority of candidates 'delivered the goods', and the marks spread was a normal curve, but with marks spread right across the spectrum. Only two mark levels between 52 and 140 did **not** have at least one candidate on it!

With regard to the dissertation, there was a clear and welcome improvement on last year's – and all previous years' – entries. The principles of how to do a good dissertation are clear and have been itemised in many previous PA Reports. This year most of the centres gave the appropriate advice and direction to their candidates. The candidates did the basic things correctly and got their just reward. The pass rate for

dissertations was over 90%, and the average pass mark moved up towards a very satisfactory high B. Centres are urged to look again at what they have done this year as a model to continue with for future years.

With regard to scripts, candidates this year seemed to benefit from the greater sense of direction that standardised source question stems gave. SQA newsletters that came out over the session gave candidates a greater sense of clarity over the demands of the different types of source question. The 'How useful...' marked exemplars (on the website) also gave clear signals to this year's candidates on how much was expected for different mark levels.

This year's cohort were both very prepared and very able, leading to improved awards across the spectrum. Mention must be made of the exceptional quality of many dissertations — more than 25 were given full marks, and these were spread across 9 of the 12 fields. Candidates must not under-estimate the importance of both introductions and conclusions. They may only be as much as one typed side each but they have a 'value-added effect' that is greater than their size.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

General comments on dissertations

1 Points about titles

A revised list of titles is on the website. It is hoped that this will remove the problems that still exist for a few candidates. The best advice would be to stick as closely as possible to the revised list (or a minor refinement of the wording of a title in it).

It is acceptable to create new titles and have them approved. **The deadline for this is 31 October, not 31 December.** However, it is unlikely that permission will be given for titles that may send candidates down the wrong track. A centre taking this approach is likely to penalise its own candidates.

It is also worrying when a centre picks an acceptable and approved title and changes it to something worse. *'Was Ernest Bevin the greatest ever Foreign Secretary?'* is NOT an improvement on *'Was Ernest Bevin a great Foreign Secretary?'*. The first title is largely outside the Course as it indicates a comparison of all foreign secretaries. The second title involves a discussion of what might be understood as 'great' in the context of Bevin's times, and a discussion of how close Ernest Bevin came to delivering it. The approved title therefore was within the field boundaries.

As always, titles that were issues (not necessarily loaded with historical debate, but which did contain the essence of an argument in the title) were better done than those with a descriptive title that were likely to degenerate into narrative.

The title MUST let the writer focus on something **within** the field boundaries. A general analysis of the causes of the failure of Tsarism since 1861 cannot be allowed to pass, or even get (m)any marks. It may be strategy for some to take a Higher Extended Essay and 'stretch it' in the hope that it will make the grade as a dissertation, but it has to be within the field boundary of the Advanced Higher Course.

Equally, a dissertation entitled *'An analysis of Lincoln's achievements'* does not need the story of his life. *'Theory and practice of Anti-Semitism'* and *'The Nature of the SS state'* (Field 8) tended to get very narrative responses, so did the *'February Revolution'* title in Field 10.

The revised list of titles on the website should eliminate this hazard.

One dissertation this year had no title at all, making it somewhat difficult to mark.

There were two examples of centres focussing on a common theme and producing **identikit dissertations** for all their pupils. These raise serious issues as to whether they are indeed the candidates' own work. Centres should monitor this closely.

2 Points about structure

The majority of candidates this year picked titles that were issues. The fact that the title in itself implied debate helped give the dissertations a basic structure, probably of 'for' and 'against'. This helped candidates, even those that did not go on to write their piece as chapters. Once again, some markers noted that chapters helped give an overall coherence to the dissertation.

The **Introduction** sets the dissertation up, it interests/intrigues the marker, it points out the general route the debate will take. Already it is giving an idea of the quality of analysis which lies behind the dissertation. If these are done poorly (or not at all), and the marker is left to work things out for themselves, the marker becomes less confident that this dissertation really is a big mark earner. A good dissertation can overcome a weak introduction, but there is no doubt that first impressions count, and candidates should take time and thought in the way they begin their dissertation.

Equally, the **Conclusion** has got to be **more than a summary** of everything that has gone before or a rehearsal of the Introduction. Markers look to reward synthesis and some form of qualitative judgement of the relative merits of the different factors that were considered.

3 Word length

This was a dramatic area of improvement. It is gratifying to see that a simple and direct instruction in the PA's Report, plus a change of rubric on the blue flyleaf, can have such a great and helpful effect on candidates' overall scores. The number of over-length dissertations dropped to approximately 20, and it now became an almost irrelevant factor in influencing the overall grade. However, it seemed to be particular centres rather than candidates that were guilty of overstepping the word count. Field 7 was a main culprit here.

Centres should note that:

- (a) The criteria for an 'A' in the dissertation require that a response is 'well organised'. A piece of work that is 2,000 words over the limit is clearly not.
- (b) Putting the word count on the bottom of each page of body text is very helpful, but if it then all adds up to **more** than the declared and signed for 'under 4,000' total on the front, then the 5 mark penalty is applied.
- (c) It is distressing when a candidate signs for 4,001 words. The 5 mark penalty is still applied.

What was more worrying was the number of dissertations that were down around the 3,000 word mark. There was one very weak effort that was only 2,000 words, of which 800 were quotations. Candidates seriously disadvantage themselves by not working towards the 4,000 word limit.

4 Points about footnotes and bibliographies

The bibliography is helpful to markers; it lets them see the width and quality of the reading that has been done; and the markers can then see for themselves whether any of that reading has shown itself in the ideas that are expressed in the dissertation itself. Candidates should be warned against the dangers of 'binge-sourcing'; there is no point filling the bibliography with an array of titles which show no sign of their authors' ideas ever having percolated into the candidate's thoughts.

There were examples of excessive footnoting; this additional writing was ignored when reading the dissertation and arriving at the mark.

5 Points about plagiarism

There were still a few unworthy attempts by candidates to copy out historians' works and pass it off as their own. In one case (Field 1) the marker wrote: *'One dissertation had nothing of the candidate in it: made up, apparently, of huge chunks from books.'*

In some fields more than others (especially Field 6) there was heavy use of the Internet without always proper referencing. In one particular centre there were dissertations with an exceptionally high standard of written English phrasing and sophisticated ideas in each paragraph, which were then linked together by weak and poor expressions. Markers are experienced teachers/lecturers who will almost certainly spot this contrast.

6 Points about typography and proof reading

Although this varied across fields, this is another area where centres seem to have taken on board the recommendations in last year's PA's Report. Generally speaking there was a superior effort made this year. Many markers reported that there were no problems at all, although others were dismayed at the poorly organised efforts that they came across now and again. There still seemed to be a sense of haste about some of them. Three dissertations were submitted with pages missing, where the centre then had to be contacted. It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure that their best work has been properly organised and delivered on time. There also were some unusual fonts that were not friendly to the readers' eyes.

In terms of written English and an appropriate writing style for this level of work, many more markers commented favourably on the high standard. The ruling on word count being applied to every page was also almost universally adhered to. This led to random counting by markers which in most cases demonstrated the veracity of the candidate's overall word count. If a page word count was not submitted, this provoked greater suspicion in the mind of the marker and triggered action.

General Comments on Examination scripts

Essays

With occasional caveats about individual candidates, most markers reported a pleasing improvement in the quality of essay responses. Many remarked upon a noticeable fall in the number of ill- or under-prepared candidates, and noted that many more were operating at the A or even upper A level.

There are still signs of candidates writing the essay they hoped would come up rather than the one that was actually asked. Some weaker candidates still 'recognise' the topic area that the question refers to, then give everything they know on that topic, hoping that somewhere along the line they answer the question. This technique generally leads to failure.

Very few candidates were penalised for lack of historical interpretations in their essays. The message seems to have really been taken on board that signs of the candidate's reading of the ideas/views of historians must be present in all essays to achieve a pass. This was an especially noteworthy improvement in some fields such as Field 1.

Getting the source questions right

SQA is keen to reward what the candidate has offered in terms of showing ability of the historical sub-skills wanted in each question. These are: accurate interpretation of the views in the source, provenance comment for some source answers, inclusion of relevant immediate and wider contextual recall to validate or criticise views in the sources, and reference to the views of historians as part of that contextualisation.

Exemplified answers to the 'How useful ...' question were published on the SQA website in May. Centres should study the commentary that was attached to each A and C exemplified answer. This is a more 'mechanistic' way of marking but is an attempt to reward candidates for what they do because it lets the marker positively respond to what the candidate provides for this range of historical skills. The 2005 marking schemes therefore have a new rubric at the start of each source question, clarifying what the candidate has to do to earn the marks for that question.

Centres may wish to look again at the exemplified ‘How useful...’ answers that were issued, and appreciate that the style of marking used there is also applied to the other source questions.

Some provisos....

- (a) The provenance marks in the source questions are now largely to be earned in the ‘How useful...’ question. There may be provenance comments awarded in the 2 source question if one of the sources is a primary source.
- (b) Good responses to provenance at Advanced Higher are a form of contextualisation, in which the candidate locates the source in history: “Why was it that person saying it?”; “Why did it matter?”; “Why then and in that way?”; “Was it the same as previous or later views?” It is answers to this sort of question which help locate the source and establish its usefulness. This is still origin and purpose but on a qualitatively higher level than, for example, ‘This is from Lenin, he was leader of the Bolshevik party and knows what he is talking about...’.

Some candidates still answered at an elementary level. The reminder to the marker by the candidate that it is a primary source, then a repetition of the source rubric on date and who said it, does not merit marks for provenance at Advanced Higher.

- (c) In the ‘How fully...’ question there may be a possibility of the candidate making provenance comments, but this source will almost invariably be a secondary source and candidates will therefore be rewarded their ‘provenance’ marks under historiographical context.
- (d) The 2-source questions are still generally done more poorly than the other two but there were pleasing signs of improvement. Firstly candidates have at last stopped seeing it as a direct comparison of the two sources; they understand that the question is asking about interpretation of the two views and how far they can be supported. Many candidates stop there however and confine themselves to saying how much the two given sources offer as perspectives (i.e. they give a for and against, and what has been missed out from those sources) without always going on to suggest what other perspectives might be appropriate to consider. It is surprising that in a question which is always phrased in terms of different perspectives, there is often no reference to historians, who, presumably, are providing the different perspectives.

There was little evidence this year of a lack of understanding of the word *perspective* but in next year’s exam it will be largely replaced by *views* or *viewpoints* or *interpretations*.

- (e) In all source questions there is scope for the candidate to bring in historians and their views as part of their wider contextual development. Candidates are unlikely to score near the top of the marks range if they include no references to historical interpretations.
- (f) With a mark allocation for a certain skill, this inevitably places a ceiling on the mark for that skill. This assures some balance in the answers. Candidates should be aware of not writing too much on say interpretation (only 3 marks allocated in the ‘How fully...’ question or 2 marks in the ‘How useful...’). If they write more than that in just purely interpreting the view there are no additional marks!

Equally of course, there is an allocation of marks for each skill, which means that if the candidate doesn’t do it at all then they miss getting all those marks.

Historiography

As mentioned earlier very few essays fell short of providing the necessary historical interpretations. Candidates looked very well drilled here, and for many of the best candidates, historians’ ideas permeated their essays. In the source questions candidates need to be reminded that historians’ views are a part of the wider contextual explanation for a historical event or issue, and this should become a revised part of how they see each bit of their course. Academic historians at the cutting edge of research and immersed in the scholarship of their field provide incisive insights and evaluations. One well chosen historian’s thoughts helps tell far more about an issue than a barrage of facts.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Comments on candidate performance in the examination papers follow, under their particular fields. In drawing up comments in these areas, I am especially grateful for the full and detailed reports that each marker and examiner submitted. They really were extremely comprehensive and I am appreciative of the time and thought that went into such helpful and constructive comments. Here and there I have quoted the views of different markers and examiners.

Field 1: North Britain

All markers in this field commented along the lines of *'the overall calibre was encouraging, reflecting an improved level of preparation.'*

There were some excellent responses to Essay Q4 on the Picts. Essay Qs 1, 2 and 5 had some promising responses.

Field 2: Scottish Wars

'The standard of responses is improving' and there were more references to good historiography.

'The strong candidates are producing exceptional work.' Markers felt that the paper covered the Course well and most candidates were comfortable with it.

Field 3: Renaissance

There was a *'pleasing level of knowledge and understanding'* and *'a good attempt to incorporate historians' views into their arguments.'*

Many candidates showed *'Solid technique on source questions'*.

Field 4: Louis XIV

There was one candidate for this field of study, who did quite well but is difficult to generalise on.

Field 5: Georgians and Jacobites

'Some very good essays that showed knowledge, ability to respond to the question and a grip of historians' views.'

Field 6: US Civil War

This year it was noted that *'candidates gave more sophisticated responses'* and *'source technique seems to have improved'*. There were very few examples of essays with no historiography.

The first source question *'was very well done'*.

Field 7: Japan

'Broadly, there were very good marks' and some *'very solid responses with most making some effort to include historiography'*.

The single source questions were tackled more capably than the 2-source question.

Field 8: Weimar and Nazi Germany

Many markers made very complimentary comments, including: *'very many outstanding examples of essay writing and source handling skills at the highest level'* and *'it was heartening to see candidates writing comfortably both in the sources and the essays.'* Another marker commented that she was *'pleasantly surprised; most candidates seemed to do themselves justice'* and another said *'there was a minority of weak candidates'* and *'there were several exceptionally well prepared candidates'*.

Essay Q1 was both popular and well done; there were also some very good answers to Essay Q3.

'Breadth of contextual knowledge was particularly impressive.'

Field 9: South Africa

'Most candidates had a good knowledge of the subject and had been well taught'. There was good use of historiography in the essays.

Field 10: Soviet Russia

There was *'outstanding quality in a majority of scripts... I marked many more As'*; another marker commented that the standard was *'better than last year'*, and many candidates were *'exceptionally knowledgeable about this topic.'*

The vast majority of candidates seemed to come up with three satisfactory or better source answers.

Field 11: Spanish Civil War

A small field with only two centres presenting this year.

Field 12: Britain at War

'Significantly better than in previous years, with some truly outstanding candidates'. This was an excellent set of candidates in every way; they seemed well taught, knew the drills on historiography and how to do source questions, they communicated their thoughts and ideas maturely. As one marker commented, *'there were some excellent candidates; their work was a pleasure to read.'*

Essay Q5 was well done and most candidates capably managed three source questions although time management for just a few candidates was poor.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Field 1: North Britain

Some candidates had a tendency not to answer the question.

Essays Q3 and Q6 were more poorly done. These were both 'two parters' which the setter felt broke the title down into more achievable sections.

Q6 on the Viking conversion may have been more poorly done because this angle has not come up recently. In respect of the source answers, for one marker there was *'an overall feeling of mediocrity'* as candidates refused to bring in the crucial wider contextualisation.

Source Q2 on the Vindolanda tablets did not offer that much scope for interpretation from the source, although the question itself invited a vast amount of contextual recall.

Field 2: Scottish Wars

In Essay Q1 the word 'consistency' caused problems.

Some candidates found it hard to construct a consistent argument to Essay Q4 on Robert Bruce.

Almost all candidates included historiography as a matter of course. In two centres, NO candidates had any historical interpretations in their essays. Centres should bear this in mind when delivering the course.

Candidates sometimes were *'let down by a lack of knowledge in the source questions'* and had a lack of historical interpretation in some source answers.

In Source Q2 some candidates misunderstood 'nature of support'.

Field 3: Renaissance

Essay Q2 was poorly done; candidates were not sure what to focus on in a very big topic.

Essay Q4 on Medici patronage was not well done. Few candidates showed awareness of revisionist views.

In their essays, some candidates were using historians as *'window dressing'*.

In the source answers, the candidates did not always want to pick up and run with the points made in the source. They often said 'this is what the source claims, this is what else I know that the source misses', rather than questioning the validity of the sources' views.

In Source Q1 candidates seemed unfamiliar with the role of the Papacy in the High Renaissance.

Field 4: Louis XIV

The candidate did quite well.

Field 5: Georgians and Jacobites

Source Q2 on the Enlightenment was found tricky by some candidates.

Field 6: US Civil War

Some candidates tried to re-interpret the essay titles to suit a prepared answer. This was noteworthy in Essay Q1 where they tried to review the state of American politics with no reference to Stephen A Douglas, and Essay Q6 which they tried to convert straight into 'Why did the South lose?' Other markers noted of some candidates that *'the questions they hoped for did not appear.'*

Source Q3 was sometimes misinterpreted by candidates who wanted to talk about emancipation rather than what the question asked on the role and power of the government.

There seemed to be pressure of time on some candidates. More than one marker commented that *'it was time and tiredness'* that led to weak answers on Source Q3.

Field 7: Japan

Essays or source questions covering industry/economic themes left some candidates struggling.

In Essay Qs 2, 3 and 5 candidates did not always have enough detailed knowledge to sustain a whole essay. In Source Qs 2 and 3, some candidates did not focus on what the questions asked about differing perspectives or evidence of attitudes.

Field 8: Weimar and Nazi Germany

A few candidates did not include historical interpretations in their essays.

The use of *poised* in Essay Q2 confused some candidates.

There was some evidence of misreading of Essay Q3 where the candidates included foreign affairs despite the title's deliberate inclusion of the word *'internal'*.

Essay Q4 was generally avoided by all candidates.

Some candidates misinterpreted Q6 as a propaganda and rise of the Nazis question.

There were some elementary approaches to provenance in Source Q1.

Source Q2 caused problems with some candidates who struggled to make the message in Source B relevant to the question, which was broader than just the Rohm Putsch.

As in Field 6, there were *'one or two candidates who found the time constraints overwhelming.'*

Field 9: South Africa

Essay Q1 sometimes caused confusion over exactly how to answer it.

Some candidates struggled to pick up the provenance marks at the expected level.

Source D proved a bit of a long and heavy read for some candidates, and they struggled to extract the relevant interpretation out of it.

Field 10: Soviet Russia

There were a number of narrative-style essays, *'all from one centre'*.

The length of the quotation in Essay Q1 posed a few problems for some candidates. The setter had hoped the list of areas to look at would have provided a helpful framework.

Too many of the answers to Essay Q4 were pre-prepared: the *'one size fits all'* approach to Stalin's rise.

Neither Essay Q2 nor Essay Q3 was a Civil War question. The Civil War cannot be expected to appear every year.

Field 11: Spanish Civil War

Candidates were not always clued up on the wider contextual detail to get good marks in the source questions.

Field 12: Britain at War

Some candidates approached the 'How useful...' question at a basic level.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Once again, congratulations go to so many centres (and their candidates) for such a good overall performance in this year's examination. It is very rewarding for examiners and markers alike to see well-prepared candidates providing answers of the quality and depth that invite us to be positive in awarding of the marks.

- 1 The dissertations were of a quality that generally ranged from steady to excellent. SQA is very appreciative of the efforts that centres made to rectify word-count problems of previous years.

The generic marking criteria are available to centres, to help remind them what characteristics are expected for each grade level. These are contained in the 2005 Marking Instructions on the History subject page of the SQA website.

SQA has published, also on the subject page of the website, the revised list of dissertation titles. These will be helpful to centres, and where possible their candidates should work from the titles on this list (or 'refinements' of titles, which do not need approval).

- 2 Centres are reminded that in May 2005, SQA published on the History subject page of the website, the new enhanced field descriptors for Advanced Higher History, which will be used as from the 2006 diet of exams. This means all centres MUST teach the six italicised areas, from where the three source questions in Part 2 will be selected. This will enhance the depth and breadth of understanding of the source questions topics, and therefore maintain the higher level of performance noted this year.

The source questions will have standardised stems and always start along the lines of: 'How useful ...?' or 'How valuable...?', 'How fully ...?' and 'How much do these two sources offer as viewpoints on ... or How helpful are these two sources as interpretations on ...?'.

The main place for provenance is in the 'How useful...?' question. Candidates should not get bogged down with provenance in the other source questions (but see details on page 7). Provenance comment should be far more sophisticated than at Standard Grade, Intermediate or Higher.

- 3
 - (a) The full marking schemes are available on the SQA website.
 - (b) The forms used by markers in assessing responses (the Ex Supplements) will be made available on the SQA website in due course. Centres may find these useful when assessing their candidates.
 - (c) The more that centres understand about the process of marking (i.e. what the team awards mark for, the emphases in marking and the number of marks that are available for each aspect of an answer) then the better prepared their candidates can become.
 - (d) The best means of becoming aware of national standards is to mark for SQA. Individuals interested should contact the Qualifications Manager directly.