

Our ref: TS/Philosophy/10/06

23 November 2007

To: SQA Co-ordinator (secondary schools, FE colleges)
Directors of Education
SCIS
Customer Account Managers

For the attention of all staff responsible for the delivery of National Qualifications in Philosophy

Action by Recipient
Response required
✓ Note and pass on
Note — update/information only

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Dear Colleague

National Qualifications in Philosophy

The contents of this letter should be passed to the member of staff responsible for National Qualifications in Philosophy.

Diet 2007

The Principal Assessor reports for diet 2007 can now be found on SQA's website (www.sqa.org.uk). These include:

- ◆ Principal Assessor report Intermediate 2 and Higher
- ◆ Principal Assessor report Advanced Higher
- ◆ Senior Verifier report National Qualifications Units

Appeals

The procedures for stage 1 and 2 appeals were completed during September and October. Colleagues are requested to follow the guidance set out in the following documents prior to submitting appeals:

- ◆ *The Appeals Process: a guide for centres* (AA0690/3, June 2002)
- ◆ *Estimates, Absentees and Assessment Appeals: Guidance on Generating Evidence* (BA0992, June 2007).

We have recently updated the *Estimates, Absentees and Assessment Appeals: Guidance on Evidence Requirements* (BA0992, June 2007) document and this is now available on our website. A hard-copy is being issued to every centre. In particular, the document clarifies subject-specific requirements as well as guidance on the general principles for generating estimates and submitting appeals.

When generating estimates and compiling evidence for absentee consideration and appeals, you should also refer to:

- ◆ Course Arrangements documents, which include Course grade descriptions
- ◆ Course assessment specifications
- ◆ SQA question papers, including specimen question papers
- ◆ SQA marking instructions
- ◆ Principal Assessor reports, which include information on grade boundaries
- ◆ any other relevant information (eg Course reports, subject update letters)

All of these documents can be downloaded from SQA's website.

The most commonly found problems in evidence submitted for appeals this year were:

- ◆ wrong or incomplete marking schemes
- ◆ evidence did not cover the complete Course
- ◆ prelim questions were drawn from too few sources
- ◆ the use of a commercially produced question paper without checking the validity of the paper
- ◆ where NABs were used the KU/AE balance was not adjusted or questions were not adapted
- ◆ the KU/AE balance clearly laid out in the Course assessment specifications and the specimen question paper was not adhered to

Centres should note that the above problems will disadvantage candidates and staff are encouraged to read the Principal Assessor reports.

The document *Estimates, Absentees and Assessment Appeals: Guidance on Evidence Requirements* (BA0992, June 2007) referred to above clarifies what evidence is required when submitting an appeal for question paper based Courses. It states that the evidence for the question paper could include:

- ◆ a prelim which cover all Units and replicates the standard, format, duration and security of SQA's question paper. This could support an appeal for Grades A, B and C and would be the most convincing evidence for an appeal for Grade A.
- ◆ a prelim which covers all Units and is split into parts and the two parts have been separated by a period of time rather than being taken on one occasion. Centres should be aware that the level of demand is less than the Course assessment. The level of demand can be increased in a number of ways such as by raising the cut-off scores or by increasing the level of challenge of the prelim. This could support an Appeal for Grades A, B and C.
- ◆ a prelim which covers a minimum of two Units of the Course plus supporting evidence, such as a high scoring NAB, for the third Unit would support an appeal for a Grade C (and possibly Grade B), but not for a Grade A.

Marking instructions

The question papers and finalised marking instructions for diet 2007 Course assessments at each level are posted on the Philosophy web page.

National Qualifications Courses

The Advanced Higher Course is now discontinued as it has consistently failed to attract the numbers required under the low uptake policy. The Advanced Higher Units will, however, remain as free-standing Units in SQA's catalogue.

Results for the revised Courses were somewhat disappointing — particularly at Intermediate 2. This is, however, not unusual for Courses that have undergone a major revision. While it is difficult to pinpoint precisely where the problems lie, the following evidence was noted from candidate responses:

- ◆ In some cases staff appeared to be still teaching to the old Course.
- ◆ The revised style of the exam paper where questions focus on specific areas of content rather than a 'write everything you know' essay style question seemed to disadvantage the Grade B, C and D candidate — the very groups they were intended to assist!
- ◆ Despite the straightforward question on Kant, candidates at Intermediate 2 struggled with this question.

SQA's policy is to monitor new and revised Courses over a three-five year period, taking in three exam diets. Results and staff comments over that time will be closely monitored.

Logic (Higher) has been retained as a free-standing Unit.

Critical Thinking in Philosophy

There were a number of queries over session 2006/07 regarding the National Assessment Bank packs for this Unit at Higher. As a result these have been revised and the new versions will now replace the originals on the secure website. Staff can continue to use the originals should they wish but they will no longer be available from the website.

An important aid for teachers is the recent publication of a book *Critical Thinking for SQA Higher and Intermediate 2 Philosophy* written by John Rafferty and published by Kynoch and Blaney (ISBN 978-0-9553973-1-8). As the title indicates this has been written specifically to meet the demands of this Unit and should be an extremely valuable resource for Philosophy teachers.

Sharing good practice

Teachers and lecturers delivering the Philosophy Courses may be interested in a website that has been set up to allow the sharing of ideas. It is **not** an official SQA site but has been set up as a forum where teachers can swap ideas, ask questions and make suggestions. You will find the site at <http://philosophyhigher.schtuff.com>.

Assessment Panel

The Social Sciences Assessment Panel continues to meet twice a year to look at issues arising in Philosophy as well as the other Social Science Subjects. Colleagues are free to feed issues arising in their subject to the Panel either directly through Panel members or via SQA officers.

Marking for SQA

Each year the number of entries for the Philosophy Courses are increasing. If you are interested in becoming a Marker in Philosophy, please e-mail **markers@sqa.org.uk** or call our Marker Helpline (0131-561 6825) and we will send a form to you. To become a Marker, we normally ask that you are in your third year of teaching the Course. We welcome applications throughout the year and, where a suitable vacancy exists, we may be able to offer an appointment for this year. The Philosophy Courses are centrally marked — this entails the Marker marking scripts over one extended period in the same venue. In a number of subject areas we have had recent examples where the results in centres have improved dramatically after a member of staff joined the marking team. The experience of marking helps to increase the awareness of the demands of Course assessment and is proven to be excellent professional and personal development.

I hope that you find the above information useful. If you would like to discuss any matter in more detail, please do not hesitate to telephone me on 0845 213 5502, or e-mail: **tom.stannage@sqa.org.uk**.

Yours faithfully,



Tom Stannage
Qualifications Manager
NQ Social Sciences and Care