

Validity, accessibility and reliability – quick reference for vetters

Validity, accessibility and reliability are necessary and complementary aspects of any quality assessment system. Validity and accessibility are concerned with what is assessed and with fair access; reliability with the consistency of assessments.

The following points should be considered at the question paper vetting stage. More detail can be found in *Question Paper Production 2013: paper-based question papers*.

- 1 Does the question paper relate to the Course assessment specification as set out in the Arrangements document?
- 2 Have questions/tasks been included which will generate the evidence of attainment required to measure against the Course Grade Descriptions? All Outcomes from the component Units must be covered and, where appropriate, there must be opportunities for assessing integration of important skills and knowledge/understanding.
- 3 Does the weight given to a particular part of the syllabus in the question paper reflect its relative importance in the syllabus?
- 4 Is the sampling of the syllabus systematic but unpredictable (to avoid question 'spotting')? In particular, has repetition of themes and resource material been avoided?
- 5 Is the level of difficulty of the overall paper appropriate?
- 6 Are the questions free of bias and stereotyping on the basis of factors such as race, religion, disability, sex, social background, sexual orientation and age?
- 7 Is the level of difficulty of individual questions appropriate? Does the mark available for each question match the demands of the task and the test specification?
- 8 Are there any problems in relation to the interpretation of marking instructions?
- 9 Does the question elicit the response expected in the marking instructions?

Validity – difficulty of questions

The level of difficulty for each question can be affected by one or more of the following.

- 1 **The type of task** (eg demonstration of knowledge and understanding, interpretation, evaluation, analysis or synthesis: and whether the candidate is asked to describe, explain, compare and contrast, interpolate, produce a strategy etc). Check that the type of task is appropriate to the level of the paper.

- 2 **The use of contexts.** The use of concrete contexts in questions can be useful, but over-lengthy contextualisation can become a test of reading rather than a test of subject matter.
- 3 **The breadth of focus.** Take care that the focus of the question is appropriate, eg in language papers the focus can vary between questions which require understanding of phrases, sentences or paragraphs.
- 4 **The language used.** Check that the language used in the questions is clear and unambiguous.
- 5 **The over-use of subject-specific language.** Subject specific language should only be used where it is necessary for the understanding of the topic. Where its use is essential, check that the general language demands of the question are kept as simple as possible.
- 6 **The question structure.** If candidates are asked to make a choice of question they must be able to find out quite quickly whether or not they know the answer. Also, questions must not be used where the correct answer depends on the candidate answering a previous part of the question correctly.
- 7 **The number of marks available.** Is the mark allocation appropriate to the difficulty level of the question, and is it clear? Questions which require a lengthy response or sustained reasoning are always demanding.
- 8 **Answer structure support.** The use of question/answer booklets can help candidates attempt each part of each question, and give a clear indication of how much writing is required. In some subjects, particularly at Standard Grade Foundation Level, the first few words of the response are given. Where the candidate has to produce a table, the table is provided and sometimes table headings can provide further support. Where there is a blank answer book, some questions give clues or 'leaders' or explicit headings to help candidates.
- 9 **The use of reference material.** Reference diagrams should only be used where they help candidates answer the question. Questions are more demanding if a candidate has to refer to a range of sources and gather information from them.
- 10 **The question layout.** Any information which is necessary to answer the question must be kept separate from the actual question. Where a question requires the candidate to consider several sources before answering, some direction should be given to help the candidate focus on the relevant information. Candidates will be affected by the appearance of a question, and thought should be given to how it is presented on the paper.
- 11 **The match between the question and the marking instructions.** If a question is open-ended then the marking instructions must allow for a range of valid answers.

Readability – accessibility checklist

- 1 Are sentences as short as possible?
- 2 Are sentence structures as simple as possible?
- 3 Has use of the passive structure been avoided?
- 4 Is information separated from questions?
- 5 Is the proper sequence of events kept in questions?
- 6 Can the amount of language used be reduced?
- 7 Has abstract, formal and metaphorical language been avoided?
- 8 Is the layout of the paper as attractive as possible?
- 9 Are there clear and sufficient signposts/reading clues?
- 10 Is the pagination well arranged?
- 11 Are the illustrations/references necessary, helpful and of high quality
- 12 Are the rubrics unambiguous, visually clear and repeated where necessary?

Reliability checklist

Reliability is concerned with the consistency of assessments.

- 1 Where there is question choice, do the various options have the same level of difficulty? Consider:
 - question structure
 - content difficulty
 - language used
 - terminology demands
 - mark allocation
 - the relative demands as shown in the marking instructions
- 2 Are the marking instructions clear and unambiguous?