



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Science in Society

SCIS2

(Specification 2400)

Unit 2: Reading and writing about science

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

The overall view of the moderating team was that this has been another very successful year where a great deal of hard work had been done by the candidates, culminating in some very interesting pieces of coursework.

Administration, supervision and guidance provided by many of the centres was again very good. Many of the centres sent work or marksheets to moderators before the deadline and any subsequent samples were quickly returned. However it was noticeable that some centres marks were reduced because of misinterpretations of the assessment criteria. The highest marks may only be obtained for work that is of AS standard and this should be the first discriminator when determining the marks. Consequently if the assessment criteria in section 3.2.4 are used without reference to the whole of section 3 difficulties can arise with high marks being given to work that is only at GCSE level.

Unfortunately poor referencing and quote citation in the text is still present in the work of some. It is essential that moderators can distinguish between the comments of the student and that of the quoted authority if the problem of plagiarism is to be avoided. Students should be shown how to correctly cite and reference their work; it is a skill that we are trying to promote through the coursework and could be very useful to them if they move on to further or higher education. The textbook has some clear examples of how to reference material and exemplar scripts can be accessed from the AQA website.

It was good to see evidence of internal moderation, especially in the larger centres. This is an excellent way of sharing good practice and giving advice to colleagues new to the specification. Similarly standardisation, provided by AQA in the autumn term, for new centres and teachers are extremely useful in applying the assessment criteria. Please remember that each centre has their own coursework adviser who may be contacted through the subject officer at AQA.

Standard of Marking

In general, the marking was very good, with a very few centres straying outside the allowed boundaries. Many centres annotate their scripts well, allowing the moderators to see how marks have been awarded, thereby giving them the evidence to give more precise feedback.

The main problem this year was the award of high marks for work that was not of AS standard. We can only assume that the assessment criteria in section 3.2.4 are being used in isolation, without considering the overall level first. It is hoped that internal standardisation will help to highlight this and many of the larger centres do this well. I would recommend that, even if you have a small number of candidates that you ask another colleague to read through some of the work to confirm your results.

Centres are reminded that the full range of marks is available and are encouraged to use that range unless there are good reasons not to.

Critical Account of Scientific Reading

It was a delight this year to read so many accounts from such a range of sources. There are so many interesting books available to the students, which deal with all the disciplines that make up science that it can be hard to choose which one to read. Consequently, the initial choice of text is extremely important in maintaining interest, but also matching the assessment criteria. It is to be hoped that candidates will have this sort of discussion with their teachers prior to committing to any one text.

Centres are reminded that the science in the “critical account” must be explained in the students own words for the higher marks. Similarly this science should be applicable to a wider context if its relevance is to be explored. This was not always clear in some of the accounts and yet high marks were awarded by some.

The concept of “how science works” is given a very broad description throughout the Science in Society specification. This should allow candidates to explore “how science works” as they read through their book or articles and make relevant comments about it. However both the science and “how science works” should be identified, fully explored and comprehensively explained if the highest marks are to be given. This year we found that, in many cases, either one or the other were explored but not both; thereby reducing overall marks.

Finally, please note that style, language and structure all mean different things when assessing a “critical account”. This year saw several centres having problems with these discriminators and giving high marks where there were little or no comments made on the language used.

Study of a Topical Scientific Issue

The Study of a topical scientific issue continues to produce some extremely interesting reports and all moderators have noted the variety of topics studied and the depth of research carried out by many of the candidates.

However the same problems as reported in previous Principal Moderator Reports are evident where marks have to be changed. Some of the key points of note have been alluded to in earlier sections of this report but markers should be aware of the following points.

Firstly, the report should be of AS level. The level used in the textbook is a good guide to this but is not definitive as it has been overtaken by some of the science taught in some GCSE specifications.

Secondly, candidates are advised to choose an issue that is a genuine debate between two informed positions. In many cases we were reading about obscure discussions where a balanced report could not be given and thereby preventing access to the highest marks. It is envisaged that teacher and student will discuss the nature of this piece of coursework before committing to it and early drafts of the work are to be encouraged.

Thirdly, the full citation of quotes and referencing of material still seems to cause problems in some centres. Help and advice with this is available in the textbook, from the website and from your coursework adviser. Ideally we would recommend the “Harvard system” for referencing as this seems to be most popular in higher education and is easy to use. Please note that generic internet referencing is not acceptable (e.g. bbc.co.uk google.com) and that quotes from the internet should contain the date accessed along with the full url. Referencing is important and centres should note the failure of students carry this out correctly, leads to suspicion that the work is not the candidate’s own. So far Science in Society has not suffered too much from plagiarism and we are keen that this should continue.

Finally, the evaluation of many of the studies has suffered from those considerations posed in the first and second points. It is not possible to gain the highest marks if the science is of too low a value or the debate is unbalanced. Many candidates need help in this section as they appear to “run out of steam” or are just unsure of how to approach the problem. Drafting and discussion with their teachers would, again, help and is a legitimate part of the teaching of this course.

The importance of the work of the teacher can be seen throughout this report and your coursework adviser is commissioned to help you in this task.

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