



General Certificate of Education

Science in Society 1401

**SCIS2 Reading and Writing about
Science**

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - June series

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GCE Science in Society, SCIS2, Reading and Writing about Science

General Comments

The majority of candidates demonstrated interest and enthusiasm in their coursework which was a pleasure for the moderators to share in. Administration by centres was generally good, with many marks and samples received by moderators on or before the deadline. However, there was an increase in centres where the administration of the work seemed to cause some problems. In these situations it is helpful if the moderator is contacted. Problems may then be addressed jointly and without any other delay. Help may also be sought from your Coursework Adviser and the notes for guidance found on the AQA website. We still saw some arithmetic and simple administrative errors and would suggest that, if possible, the sample is prepared by more than one person.

Centres are reminded that candidates' work should be removed from any bulky binders and that the papers and accompanying record form should be securely fixed together such that the moderator can easily read the work and associated marks.

It was clear that candidates who were well prepared gained high marks in their coursework. They had been guided through the assessment objectives and the drafting of their work gave them the opportunity to realise their full potential. The teacher plays a significant role here and their understanding of the marking criteria is critical to the marks obtained by their students. In this way, for example, the extensive quoting and poor referencing we observed could be reduced. Centres are reminded that, when quoting from a website, the full URL and date accessed are expected in the reference.

A Coursework Adviser is available to each centre and their use is encouraged. Standardisation meetings are held at a number of venues around the country in the autumn term to which new centres, and some others, are automatically invited. Centres where a new member of staff is involved in assessment, particularly if they are leading the assessment, are advised to contact AQA to enquire about attendance at one of these meetings.

The AQA Subject Officer and Coursework Advisers are always available for support and advice. Support material and links to other associated resources for this work are freely available on the AQA website.

Standard of marking

This is the first year of the Science in Society course and all centres had to deal with the marking of the new criteria for coursework. In general, the marking was very good, with the criteria being well understood in the 'Study of a Topical Scientific Issue' in particular. There seemed to be a little confusion with the higher level descriptors in the 'Critical Account of Scientific Reading' and centres are reminded that full explanations are needed to gain the highest marks.

Erratic marking was noted in a small number of centres that required a disproportionate amount of moderator time to process. In many cases this might have been avoided by thorough internal standardisation procedures or study of the material provided at standardisation sessions in consultation with the Coursework Adviser if necessary. The full range of marks is available and centres are encouraged to use that range unless there is good reason for this approach to be inappropriate.

Centres are reminded that, where the length of the work submitted is significantly shorter than specified, it will rarely be appropriate for the full range of marks to be accessed.

Critical Account of Scientific Reading

Candidates' accounts showed a wide range of reading which reflects the increasing number of readily available popular science books. However, the choice of what to read is critical in the marks that may be awarded. If the book does 'not contain very much science', then it should be avoided.

Some centres may be helped by a reminder that, in assessing the science explanation in candidates' work, a mere listing of the science content should gain marks in the lowest band. A description of the science is better, but candidates should explain the science in their own words to achieve marks in the highest band.

Centres are reminded that if candidates read just one chapter of many modern books, this will not fulfil the specified task and will often not give enough context to allow proper reflection and access the full range of marks. A good personal reflection will include the reasons for choice of particular science chosen for succinct explanation in the context of an exploration of their full reading.

It should also be noted that the marking criteria cover both the science to be explained and the concepts of *How Science Works*. High marks may not be gained from a discussion of the *How Science Works* concepts alone.

For a very limited number of centres, where more than one candidate is writing an account of the same reading, it is essential that annotation clearly indicates the nature of the additional oversight which will have been necessary, along with any observations relating to this. It is to be hoped that, with such a large range of popular science books, that this situation should not arise too often. Candidates at this level should be able to show the initiative needed to find their own relevant text.

Study of a Topical Scientific Issue

Moderators saw many well constructed and thorough studies in which candidates have clearly enjoyed exploring a topic of interest in depth.

In general, the marking criteria were well understood by most centres. However the same confusion of *How Science Works* being marked highly, where there was no associated explanation of the science, was evident. High marks were also given in some cases to purely descriptive accounts of a scientific issue. Centres are reminded that the study is designed to allow candidates to 'weigh evidence, analyse views on an issue and draw personal conclusions from the evidence'. This is most easily done if there is a debate amongst scientists, where the differences in views can be seen and explained.

Many candidates reference their work poorly or not at all. Guidance is needed to the appropriate standard of referencing in a research study report. To access the higher mark bands candidates are expected to; provide full documentation which includes a full list of references, specific citation in the text where those references are used, and some evaluation of those sources. Candidates particularly benefit from guidance in choosing an appropriate range of, and evaluating, on-line resources. Without a range of sources and evaluation of those sources, candidates cannot access the full range of marks available for research. Generic

internet referencing is not acceptable (bbc.co.uk, google.com, etc) and guidance on full referencing of such sources is readily available. Failure to do this will limit candidates' marks and gives moderators cause for concern that the work is not the candidates own.

Plagiarism is not malpractice when candidates honestly reference their sources, although it is undoubtedly poor practice and must be penalised accordingly in marking content. Moderators expect teachers to comment (on Candidate Record Forms) on all incidences of such plagiarism.

The evaluation of the study seems to cause, even some of the best candidates, problems. Often real arguments are not presented and, although summaries of the opposing views are helpful, the highest marks demand more than a simple repeat of position. The teachers' advice and guidance here is helpful in provoking the candidate to think about the issue and develop their own view on the problem.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.