2009 English

Advanced Higher – Specialist Study (Dissertation)

Finalised Marking Instructions

CONTENTS

PART 1 ADMINISTRATIVE POINTS

A. SQA PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS

The most significant of these are that markers must:

- **attend the meeting of markers –** convened to clarify the procedures to be followed and to establish the standards to be applied in the course of their marking
- **take personal responsibility for assessing each dissertation allocated to them –** fairly and consistently in accordance with the guidance and exemplars provided at the meeting of markers
- **provide SQA with a report –** outlining the principal features of candidate performance and drawing attention to any other matters of assessment or procedure they consider relevant.

B. TECHNICAL MATTERS CONCERNING THE VALIDITY OF SUBMISSIONS

The key statement concerning the validity of dissertations submitted for external assessment occurs in the National Course Specification and is as follows:

"In relation to *English: Specialist Study*, one of the two mandatory component units of the course, candidates will be subject to the following external assessment requirement:

- **by 30 April**, candidates will be required to submit to SQA, as a mandatory component of course assessment, a dissertation on their approved topic, authenticated as having been produced in a manner that satisfies the evidence requirements of the unit."

Several matters arise with regard to validity in the light of this statement.

1. Length

Matters here are very clear. As a key evidence requirement, each dissertation

"must be between 3500 and 4500 words in length, including quotations but excluding mandatory footnotes and bibliography".

In the National Unit Specification: support notes, further emphasis is given to the importance of adhering to these regulations on length:

"In order to achieve consistency in this area, teachers/lecturers and candidates should note that 4500 words (including quotations) is the maximum length permissible. Dissertations which exceed these will disqualify candidates from achieving the outcome and consequently the unit."

There is no flexibility here. There is no sliding scale of penalties. Either the dissertation is valid in terms of length (and can be accepted for external assessment) or it is not (and cannot therefore be accepted).

Any dissertation which exceeds the maximum length should be marked in the normal way and referred to the Principal Assessor.

2. Footnotes and bibliographies

Markers should note that the provision of footnotes and bibliography is "mandatory".

Any dissertation which fails to satisfy either part of this requirement should be marked in the normal way and referred to the Principal Assessor.

3. Authentication

Authentication of dissertations as "having been produced in a manner that satisfies the evidence requirements of the unit" must be included on the Specialist Study Flyleaf. The absence of a candidate signature should be reported to SQA.

4. Plagiarism

Almost all dissertations will be to some extent derivative. This is to be expected, and markers should be careful not to penalise the efforts of candidates who are honestly using the ideas of other writers to strengthen their own arguments. Usually, the more marked this derivativeness, the weaker the dissertation will tend to be. Although candidates will not always admit the extent of their use and adaptation of key critical ideas, they do normally acknowledge direct quotation and paraphrasing. A minority, however, may attempt systematic plagiarism of a fairly audacious kind. Such plagiarism may be established if markers have access directly to the sources used by candidates. Plagiarism may also be detected from internal evidence – discontinuities in style, extreme variations in the quality of thought and comment in different parts of the dissertation, obvious and elementary failure on the part of candidates to grasp the meaning of what they have written, miscellaneous gross absurdities and tell-tale blunders. Caution, of course, must be exercised in drawing conclusions exclusively from internal evidence. Nevertheless, markers have a responsibility to treat all candidates equally. In fairness, therefore, to the vast majority of honest candidates who have not engaged in plagiarism, those who have done so (or are seriously suspected of having done so) should be reported to SQA.

PART 2 THE SPECIALIST STUDY MARKING SCHEME AND HOW TO USE IT

Markers should develop an understanding of the rationale of the marking scheme which they are required to apply and of the various considerations that have informed its construction.

The construction of category descriptions

The starting point for the construction of category descriptions is the information on Performance Criteria and Indicators of Excellence for the various assessment components for Advanced Higher English published in the Arrangements document.

In all components, there is clear consistency of statement in relation to both Performance Criteria and Indicators of Excellence.

The extracts presented on the following page, in which key features of required performance are emboldened, illustrate this consistency. Virtually identical statements are made about characteristic Performance Criteria and Indicators of Excellence for each of the assessment components – although it should be noted that the criterion of Expression does not apply to the assessment of Textual Analysis and that criteria different from those presented in this document apply to the assessment of Creative Writing.

GRADE C **Performance Criteria**	**GRADE A** **Indicators of Excellence** *At least 4 bullet points from at least two categories*
Understanding The response takes a **relevant** and **thoughtful** approach to the prescribed task and demonstrates **secure** understanding of key elements, central concerns and significant details of the texts or of the linguistic or media field of study.	**Understanding** • A **thorough exploration** is made of the implications of the prescribed task. • **Sustained insight** is revealed into key elements, central concerns and significant details of the texts or of the linguistic or media fields of study.
Analysis The response makes **relevant** and **thoughtful** critical/analytical comment and demonstrates **secure** handling of literary, linguistic or media concepts, techniques, forms, usages.	**Analysis** • A **full** and **satisfying** range of critical/ analytical comment is offered. • Literary, linguistic or media concepts, techniques, forms, usages are handled with **skill** and **precision**.
Evaluation Judgements made are **relevant**, **thoughtful** and **securely based** on detailed evidence drawn from primary and, where appropriate, secondary sources.	**Evaluation** • **Perceptive** and **incisive** judgements are made. • Deployment of evidence drawn from primary and, where appropriate, secondary sources is **skilful** and **precise**.
Expression Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are consistently **accurate** and **effective** in developing a **relevant** argument.	**Expression** • Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are **skilfully deployed** to develop a **pertinent** and **sharply focused** argument.

The words that best strike the note that is characteristic of **competence** of performance (equivalent to Grade C) at the level of Advanced Higher are:

- relevant
- thoughtful
- secure
- consistent
- accurate
- effective.

At this level, **excellence** (equivalent to Grade A) is indicated by words such as:

- thorough
- sustained
- insight
- full
- satisfying
- perceptive
- incisive
- skilful
- precise
- pertinent
- sharply focused.

In response to this flexibility, the following external assessment framework of four "pass" categories and two "fail" categories has been adopted for the grading of candidate performance in each of the Advanced Higher English assessment components:

Category 1 **Excellent –** well aligned with a significant number of the published indicators of excellence.

Category 2 **Still signs of excellence –** but not quite so well aligned with (or aligned with fewer of) the published indicators of excellence.

Category 3 **More than competent –** in some significant ways beyond some of the published performance criteria.

Category 4 **Competent –** in overall quality firmly anchored to the published performance criteria.

Category 5 **Less than competent –** in some significant ways not quite achieving all of the published performance criteria.

Category 6 **Incompetent –** well below Advanced Higher level as required by the published performance criteria.

A 40-point scale (corresponding to a weighting of 40% in the final award) has been adopted for the assessment of the dissertation. It applies to these (briefly described) six categories as follows:

CATEGORY 1 **35 – 40**	**Excellent –** well aligned with a significant number of the published indicators of excellence: thorough exploration and sustained insight; full, satisfying comment and skilful handling of technique; perceptiveness/incisiveness and skilful use of evidence; a sharply focused argument.

CATEGORY 2 **30 – 34**	**Still signs of excellence –** but not quite so well aligned with (or aligned with fewer of) the published indicators of excellence: not quite so thorough or sustained; not quite so full or satisfying or skilful; not quite so sharply focused.

CATEGORY 3 **25 – 29**	**More than competent –** in some significant ways beyond some of the published performance criteria: glimmers of insight or perceptiveness or incisiveness; occasionally satisfying critical comment; occasionally skilful deployment of evidence in support of argument.

CATEGORY 4 **20 – 24**	**Competent –** in overall quality firmly anchored to the published performance criteria: relevant and thoughtful secure and consistent accurate and effective.

CATEGORY 5 **15 – 19**	**Less than competent –** in some significant ways not quite achieving all of the published performance criteria: some weakness in relevance or thoughtfulness or security of understanding or accuracy or consistency or effectiveness in the development of argument.

CATEGORY 6 **00 – 14**	**Incompetent –** well below Advanced Higher level as required by the published performance criteria: deficient in (probably) more than one of – relevance or thoughtfulness or security of understanding or accuracy or consistency or effectiveness in the development of argument.

Using the category descriptions

The following (fully described) categories are founded on the published performance criteria and indicators of excellence for the Specialist Study. They should be used as the basic "map" by which markers arrive at the category and the numerical mark within that category which best represents the attainment of each candidate.

CATEGORY 1 **MARKS: 35—40**

Excellent – well aligned with a significant number of the published indicators of excellence.

Understanding
- A thorough exploration is made of the implications of the stated topic.
- Sustained insight is revealed into key elements, central concerns and significant details of the texts or of the linguistic or media field of study.

Analysis
- A full and satisfying range of critical/analytical comment is offered.
- Literary, linguistic or media concepts, techniques, forms, usages are handled with skill and precision.

Evaluation
- Perceptive and incisive judgements are made.
- Deployment of evidence from primary and, where appropriate, secondary sources is skilful and precise.

Expression
- Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are skilfully deployed to develop a pertinent and sharply focused argument.

CATEGORY 2 **MARKS: 30—34**

Still signs of excellence – but not quite so well aligned with (or aligned with fewer of) the published indicators of excellence.

Understanding

As for Category 1, but
- the attempt made to explore the implications of the topic is not quite so thorough
- insight is not quite so well sustained.

Analysis

As for Category 1, but
- the range of critical/analytical comment is not quite so full or satisfying
- relevant techniques, concepts, forms, usages are not handled with quite the same level of skill and precision.

Evaluation

As for Category 1, but
- judgements made are not quite so perceptive or incisive
- deployment of evidence is not quite so skilful or precise.

Expression

As for Category 1, but
- expression is not quite so skilfully deployed or argument quite so sharply focused.

CATEGORY 3 **MARKS: 25—29**

More than competent – in some significant ways beyond some of the published performance criteria.

Understanding

As for Category 4, but
with glimmers of – awareness of implications or thoroughness or insight.

Analysis

As for Category 4, but
with glimmers of – fulness or skill or precision of critical/analytical comment.

Evaluation

As for Category 4, but
with glimmers of – perceptiveness or incisiveness or skilful deployment of evidence.

Expression

As for Category 4, but
with glimmers of – skilful deployment of language in the development of argument.

CATEGORY 4 **MARKS: 20—24**

Competent – in overall quality firmly anchored to the published performance criteria.

Understanding

The dissertation takes a relevant and thoughtful approach to the stated topic and demonstrates secure understanding of key elements, central concerns and significant details of the texts or of the linguistic or media field of study.

Analysis

The dissertation makes relevant and thoughtful critical/analytical comment and demonstrates secure handling of literary, linguistic or media concepts, techniques, forms, usages.

Evaluation

Judgements made are relevant, thoughtful and securely based on detailed evidence drawn from primary and, where appropriate, secondary sources.

Expression

Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are consistently accurate and effective in developing a relevant argument.

CATEGORY 5 **MARKS: 15—19**

Less than competent – in some significant ways not quite achieving all of the published performance criteria.

Understanding

As for Category 4, but
with some weakness in – relevance or thoughtfulness or security of understanding of key elements, central concerns, significant details.

Analysis

As for Category 4, but
with some weakness in – relevance or thoughtfulness or accuracy or range of critical/analytical comment.

Evaluation

As for Category 4, but
with some weakness in – relevance or thoughtfulness or substantiation of judgements made.

Expression

As for Category 4, but
with some weakness in – accuracy or effectiveness of structure or style or language or critical/analytical terminology in the development of argument.

CATEGORY 6 **MARKS: 00—14**

Incompetent – well below Advanced Higher level as required by the published performance criteria.

Understanding

The dissertation is deficient in – relevance or thoughtfulness or security of understanding of key elements, central concerns, significant details.

Analysis

The dissertation is deficient in – relevance or thoughtfulness or accuracy or range of critical/analytical comment.

Evaluation

The dissertation is deficient in – relevance or thoughtfulness or substantiation of judgements made.

Expression

The dissertation is deficient in – accuracy or effectiveness of structure or style or language or critical/analytical terminology in the development of argument.

N.B. It should be noted that, in the category descriptions provided, where performance in one category is described as "significantly" different from performance in an adjacent category, this may be demonstrated by:

- marginally stronger or weaker performance **in a range of aspects**
  or
- very much stronger or weaker performance **in one or two aspects**.

Several factors should be taken into account before assigning each candidate's dissertation to a particular numerical mark within a particular category.

- Categories are not grades. Although derived from the performance criteria for Grade C and the indicators of excellence for Grade A, the six categories are designed primarily to assist with the placing of each candidate response at an appropriate point on a continuum of achievement. Assumptions about final grades or association of final grades with particular categories should not be allowed to get in the way of objective assessment.

- The expectation is that the vast majority of candidates will already have demonstrated in unit assessment a level of competence that has merited achievement of the unit outcome. Markers should begin, therefore, with the expectation that the dissertation will meet, at least, the requirements of category 4. While there may be some dissertations that for various reasons fail to demonstrate the level of competence required by category 4, the likelihood is that they will prove characteristic of category 5 – and it is hoped that no dissertation will be so incompetent as to require assignment to the lower reaches of category 6.

  Any dissertation which is given a mark of less than 10 should be referred to the Principal Assessor.

- For each category, a range of marks is available within which markers may refine their assessments, for example within a mark or two at the upper end, the middle or the lower end of the category. The marks range within each category should prove sufficiently generous to allow markers scope for fair and justifiable discrimination. Markers are encouraged to make full use of the ranges of marks available to them.

- Mixed profiles of attainment will occur. Normally, these will represent variations within the range of performance that is characteristic of a particular category. In some instances, however, performance may be so uneven as to require markers to weigh up strengths and weaknesses of performance that extend across categories. Markers are reminded that their assessment should at all times be **holistic –** assigning each dissertation to the category (and to the numerical point within that category) that best describes its overall achievement. In instances where there is genuine doubt as to whether a dissertation should be placed at the lower end of a higher category or at the upper end of a lower category (and only in such instances), candidates should be given the benefit of the doubt, and their dissertations awarded the lowest mark in the higher category.

  Any dissertation which presents such a mixed profile of attainment (or some other such difficulty) that it cannot be assessed fairly in terms of the category descriptions should be referred to the Principal Assessor – with explanation of the nature of the difficulty encountered and with justification of the numerical mark awarded.

- **NO ANNOTATIONS OR COMMENTS SHOULD BE ADDED TO THE SUBMISSIONS OF CANDIDATES (including flyleaf forms). The entry of a mark (which carries its own meaning in terms of the category descriptions provided) is all that is required – and all that is permitted.**

[END OF MARKING INSTRUCTIONS]