

## **How to use the SQA web site to improve your exam results.**

### **1. Where is the SQA website?**

The SQA website can be found at [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk). When you go to this address you will arrive at the SQA homepage.

### **2. What information is available to me when I get there?**

There is lots of really useful information available on this site. This booklet will help you find and use two types of information

- a. Marking instructions
- b. Principal assessor reports.

### **3. How do I select a subject?**

- a. Once you arrive at the SQA homepage you will see the words 'Select a subject' written in grey. Use the pull down menu under 'NQ / Standard Grade' to select one of your examination subjects, for example Physics and press the 'GO' button. You will be taken to the home page for that subject.
- b. Scroll down the page until you come to the heading 'Subject-Specific Information' written in orange. You will find a list with 12 bullet points. The ones that are most useful to you are 'Marking instructions' and 'Principal assessor reports'.

### **4. How do I download the marking instructions?**

- a. Click on 'Marking instructions' from the list of bullet points. You will be taken to a page headed 'Marking instructions'. There will be three sub-headings; one each for 2005, 2004, and 2003. Under these subheadings you find links to the marking instructions for each level available in these years (except Standard Grade where the marking instructions are only available for 2005)
- b. Click on the year and level that you wish to download, for example 2005 Standard Grade General Level. You will be taken to a page headed Standard Grade General Level which has a large icon of a downward pointing arrow. Click on this arrow and the marking instructions will be downloaded.
- c. You will now have a file containing the finalised marking instructions for the exam that you selected. If the exam was done on a 'write-on' paper, you will also get the exam paper too! (saves you having to buy it)

### **5. How can I use the marking instructions?**

Put simply, the marking instructions give you all the answers for the exam paper, but, unlike the answers that you get with past paper books, they also tell you how the answers were marked.

If you have ever wondered why your teacher only gave you half a mark or one mark out of two for a question in a test then these marking instructions will help you to understand why your teacher did this. The instructions will also show you what the SQA expect from a pupil who would get 100% in the exam.

Okay, so you might not get 100% in your final exam but if you can avoid making silly mistakes (such as in Physics not putting in units) or if you can understand what the SQA expect from you when they ask you to ‘describe and explain’ something then you stand a much better chance of improving your grade.

Here’s how you can use the marking instructions.

- a. Try to answer a question from your past paper
- b. Mark it using the official marking instructions.
- c. If you get the question totally correct – well done!
- d. If you don’t get the question totally correct, use the marking instructions to find where you went wrong; for example would you only get half a mark because you drew the correct symbol for an ammeter but you put it across the component instead of in series with the component? (2005 Physics G paper Q10).
- e. If you still don’t know why you got the question wrong – ask your teacher for help.

## **6. How do I download the Principal assessors report?**

- a. Select the subject that you are interested in (see the instructions for How do I select a subject?)
- b. Scroll down the page until you come to the heading ‘Subject-Specific Information’ written in orange.
- c. Click on the bullet point for ‘Principal Assessors Report’. You will be taken to a page headed ‘Principal Assessors Report’. These reports are available at all levels for the years 2005, 2004, 2003, and 2002.
- d. Click on the year and level that you wish to download for example 2005 Standard Grade. You will be taken to a page headed ‘Standard Grade Principal Assessor Report’ which has a large icon of a downward pointing arrow. Click on this arrow and Principal Assessor Report will be downloaded.
- e. You will now have a file containing the Principal Assessor Report for the exam that you selected.

## **7. How can I use the Principal Assessors Report?**

The Principal Assessors Report is a summary of information about the exam that you have selected. It has the same format for every exam. Not all of the information is useful to you but a lot of it is. Here is what the report contains and how you can use it to your advantage.

a. **Statistical information**

- **update.** This is a summary of how many people sat the exam – not of much use to you.
- **Performance of candidates.** This tells you what percentage of candidates got what grade – again not much use to you.
- **Grade boundaries for each assessable element in the subject included in the report.** This information is useful to you. It tells you what mark you had to achieve to get each grade, for example in the 2005 Standard Grade Physics Knowledge and Understanding section you needed to get 30 out of 50 marks (or better) to get a grade 1. Now when you try a past paper you can find out what grade you would have got.
- **Comments on grade boundaries for each assessable element.** These comments are not of much use to you.

b. **Comments on candidate performance.** This is where the really useful information begins.

- **General comments.** As the title says, this is just some general information about how people did in the exam.
- **Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well.** Here is a list of all of the questions that people did really well in. Try all of the questions and mark them using the marking instructions. Did you get most of them correct? If you didn't then try to find out why. If you are still stuck then ask your teacher.
- **Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty.** This is a gold mine of information. You will find a list of all of the questions that were badly done in the exam. You should have a really good look at these questions. Try the questions and mark them using the marking instructions. Would you have got full marks for these questions? Why do you think people found them difficult? What traps do you think people fell into? Make sure that you are able to do these type of questions. If you are still having problems with them – ask your teacher to help you.

c. **Recommendations**

- **Feedback to centres.** This last section gives some general advice to teachers about what they can do to help their pupils – this can be useful for pupils too.