

## **2017 Social Subjects**

### **Geography Results**

#### **National 5**

Barring one pupil, every pupil who was entered for the N5 exam produced an assignment that was marked as a pass with marks ranging from 9 to 20 out of 20 - this was the first time that the department had a pupil who achieved full marks in the assignment (in fact three pupils managed this feat). This was very pleasing given the lack of availability of samples of pupils work from the SQA (although previous pupils work had been used, with their permission, to provide pupils with an idea of the standard of work expected of them). This meant that professional judgement had to be used to decide who should and should not be presented for N5 based on their assignment, which was obviously successful on the whole. This was due in no small part to the marking of N5 assignments during the 2014 exam diet that was undertaken by the department.

The average mark for the assignment was 15 out of 20 (75%) which was one mark higher than last year - showing that not only were pupils managing to pass the assignment but were passing at what could potentially be a grade A if this result was replicated in the question paper. These strong marks can also be attributed to the opportunity to participate in fieldwork trips (such as the S4 Social Studies trip to Edinburgh and the S4 River Broom trip) both of which greatly benefit pupils as they can actively experience the work that they produce helping them to retain the information that is needed for the write up under exam conditions. Moreover doing more than one trip ensures that pupils have two opportunities to produce an assignment, ensuring that the best one can be sent away. This benefits many pupils as they usually learn from their first experience of writing up an assignment meaning that on their second opportunity, they do much better. This practice has been replicated for the current school session.

The success in the assignment component bodes well for future classes as the department has now got experience in marking the N5 Assignment for the SQA and copies of the work that were sent away have been retained. There is therefore a wider range of assignments available to show the level of work expected of pupils to obtain a high mark.

Streamlining the unit assessment process ensured that there was plenty of time available for revision this year. Moreover the department also now has four years' worth of experience in marking the N5 question paper, which has benefited pupils not only in the familiarity with course content but also with exam technique and how individual questions are marked and treated by the SQA.

Looking at the overall grades, there was a high pass rate of 88% of pupils obtaining an award (1% lower than last year). 21% of pupils who passed, passed with a grade A which is 29% lower than last year although the cohort was much larger (16 pupils compared to 8). Using the fall back N4 worked well for those pupils who could have been entered for N4 or N5, a successful strategy for two students. However, pushing as many pupils as possible to attempt the N5 rather than just restricting them to N4 was a worthwhile practice as some of them did manage to pass and did not need the fall back N4.

## **Higher**

This year was the second year that the department undertook the new Higher and barring one pupil, every pupil who was entered for the Higher exam produced an assignment that was marked as a pass with marks ranging from 13 to 25 out of 30. The average mark for the assignment was 20 out of 30 (67%) which is three marks or 10% higher than last year. This was very pleasing given the lack of availability of samples of pupils work from the SQA (although previous pupils work had been used, with their permission, to provide pupils with an idea of the standard of work expected of them). This meant that professional judgement had to be used to decide who should and should not be presented for Higher based on their assignment, which was obviously successful on the whole. This was due in no small part to the marking of Higher assignments during the 2015 exam diet that was undertaken by the department, a practice that was replicated in the 2017 exam diet which hopefully bodes well for the coming session.

On the other hand, the marks in the question paper were disappointing with an average mark in the question paper of 28 out of 60 (47%) which was five marks (8%) lower than last year\*. This is somewhat hard to explain given that (in the opinion of the department) the exam was fair and was very predictable with regards to the topics that were assessed. Moreover, the department chooses to continue with the Development and Health topic for Higher to extend and build on previous knowledge gained during N5 and there was also a substantial period of time available for revision at the end of the course. Ultimately only six pupils sat the exam (compared to eight in 2016) so when looking at statistics the small size of the cohort can skew the results.

Looking at the overall grades, there was a high pass rate of 100% of pupils (who sat the exam) obtaining an award (18% higher than last year) and although no pupils obtained a grade A (it was 50% last year), it should be noted that no one was estimated to do so. Only two pupils failed to achieve an award: both of which did not attend the exam. This was disappointing given that their assignments were both marked as a pass.

As this was only the second running of the new Higher by the department, there are many changes that will be made moving forward to ensure that pupils fulfil their potential. To

improve pupil performance in the assignment, the department will make use of the knowledge gleaned from marking the assignments during the 2017 exam diet. Moreover, rather than marking the Higher assignment again the department will try to move from marking the N5 question paper to marking the Higher question paper for the 2018 exam diet. This will hopefully allow the department to address the lower question paper marks from the 2019 exam diet onwards. Also, copies of the assignments that were sent away have been retained by the department and the best of these will be shared (with the permission of the pupils concerned) to help make the standard expected by the SQA clear to pupils.

\* It should be noted that the grade boundaries for the Higher Geography exam this year were lower than expected: A (68%), B (58%), C (47%) and D (41%).

## **History Results Analysis**

### **National 5**

Barring two students, every pupil who was entered for the N5 exam produced an assignment that was marked as a pass with marks ranging from 12 to 15 out of 20. This was very pleasing given the lack of availability of samples of students work from the SQA (although previous students work had been used, with their permission, to provide students with an idea of the standard of work expected of them). This meant that professional judgement had to be used to decide who should and should not be presented for N5 based on their assignment, which was obviously successful on the whole.

The average mark for the assignment was 13.5 out of 20 (68%) - showing that not only were students managing to pass the assignment but were passing at what could potentially be a grade B, if this result was replicated in the question paper. These relatively strong marks can in part be attributed to the opportunity to participate in fieldwork trips to Edinburgh and the battlefields of World War One, which greatly benefit students as they can actively experience the work that they produce helping them to retain the information that is needed for the write up under exam conditions. However, students are not yet obtaining the top grades and this is something to target, this year. Being a marker should help to do this.

Looking at the overall grades, of the 4 students in the class, all were entered for National 5. Of the 2 who passed one achieved a B 4 and the other was a C5. The 2 students who achieved no award were however, able to achieve their National 4 as a fall back as the added value had been completed beforehand.

### **Higher**

This year was the second year that the department undertook the new Higher and every pupil who was entered for the Higher exam produced an assignment that was marked as a

pass with marks ranging from 17 to 24 out of 30. The average mark for the assignment was 21 out of 30 (70%) showing that not only were students managing to pass the assignment but were passing at what could potentially be a grade A if this result was replicated in the question paper. This was very pleasing given the lack of official samples from the SQA (although previous students work had been used, with their permission, to provide students with an idea of the standard of work expected of them). This meant that professional judgement had to be used to decide who should and should not be presented for Higher based on their assignment, which was obviously successful on the whole. This was due in no small part to the marking of Higher assignments during the 2016 exam diet that was undertaken by the department, a practice that was replicated in the 2017 exam diet which hopefully bodes well for the coming session.

Looking at the overall grades, there was a pass rate of 100%, which is immensely satisfying. There was one A grade and 5 B's. With all students achieving a C or above, however some students did not achieve to their full potential but others overachieved in comparison to their predictions.

As this is only the second running of the new Higher by the department, there are small changes that will be made moving forward to ensure that students fulfil their potential. To improve pupil performance in the assignment, the department will make use of the knowledge gleaned from marking the assignments during the 2017 exam diet. Also, copies of the assignments that were sent away have been retained by the department and the best of these will be shared (with the permission of these students) to clearly demonstrate the standard expected by the SQA.

## **Modern Studies**

### **National 4**

There were nine candidates who achieved a National 4 in Modern Studies. Eight of these were banked from S3 for students in the BGE phase that reached the standard but discontinued with the subject in S4.

### **National 5**

There were nine students presented in Modern Studies at National 5, which represents (100%) of the students who chose Modern Studies in S4. Eight of the nine achieved passing grades from A-C (88.9%), which is generally pleasing and significantly higher than the (50%) predicted. One student did not achieve the Nat 5 standard, mostly due to erratic attendance through ill health. She was subsequently entered for a National 4 having previously completed the units thereby safeguarding her from a no award. This student also gained three unit passes at Nat 5. The assignment marks had a narrow spread; 16-20/20,

with the average score coming out at 18.67, which is highly satisfying for this department. This helped to ensure improved grades for most students undertaking the final exam. The department will continue with current advice to students regarding assignments and demonstrate excellence with the considerable array of full mark assignments in the department. For the coming session, the teacher has joined a Highland Working Group in Modern Studies to better improve her understanding of course content changes and their implications. The teacher will also continue to mark for the SQA at Nat5 and Higher to ensure quality delivery within the department.

### **Higher**

There were eight students presented in Modern Studies at Higher, which represents (100%) of the students who chose Modern Studies in S5. All students sitting the exam passed with grades ranging from C-A. The breakdown is as follows 2Cs, 3Bs and 3As. According to the Insight data, this is above the Highland and national average. These passes, also includes two high ability students from S4, who were encouraged to 'crash' the higher. This proved a very successful strategy for these students as both gained good pass grades at this level, i.e. a B and an A grade. This is very pleasing for the department and the students and represents accelerated progression for these students.

**Elements of the Higher:** The Assignment was on the whole well done as the lowest score was 18, which translates to a B grade. The highest assignment scored 28, which is an excellent achievement for this student. Therefore, there is an eleven mark spread between the lowest and highest scoring assignment. The assignment marks helped to raise the three lowest achieving students overall grades. Two of the higher achieving students were slightly disadvantaged by their assignment. The teacher, having marked these and compared them to previous years' assignments, believes that it is clear that the SQA has made it more difficult to get top grades in this element. This information will be shared with the current cohort of students, to overcome this.

### **The Exam**

Three students performed significantly better than their Prelim scores suggested and were encouraged to work harder to improve their performance. This they achieved, two students performed slightly under their predicted scores, which is disappointing for both them and the department. Two students performed as predicted and this is slightly disappointing as they did not improve.

Overall, the Higher results were pleasing.

## **Advanced higher**

One student was presented at Advanced Higher level and obtained an A pass, (100%). This was very pleasing as the student had a high level of school absence and had to be actively encouraged to sit the exam.

## **Overall**

Moving forward, the faculty welcomes the SQAs decision to remove the compulsory unit assessments at N5. This will free up time in classes for both further activities and revision as well as allowing the department to return to the highly successful model of end of topic, timed, closed-book tests based on past paper questions as used during Standard Grade. This will hopefully see pupils being better prepared for the exam as well as allowing time throughout the year to experiment with AAAs as required.

There are elements within the faculty that are very pleasing. Students are given opportunities to achieve at different levels, often closing the attainment gap that is more evident in other faculties. This is especially the case for national 5 and a policy the faculty intends to continue with.

A further pleasing feature is that all staff intend to continue their SQA marking, ensuring up-to-date knowledge giving them vital understanding and experience. This practice is to be commended.

P McCann

PT Social Subjects