

Keeping you informed ...

This newsletter is the first in a series planned for distribution to schools over the next few months. Its purpose is to keep teachers informed of actions that the Board of Studies is taking to further refine the HSC examination program for 2002. These actions are in response to the recommendations from the review of the 2001 examination program by Professor Geoff Masters and evaluations carried out by the Board of Studies.

This newsletter includes important information about the process of sampling syllabus content and outcomes in setting exams, and enhancements to the HSC exam setting process.

Newsletter 2 will feature an article about the intention and use of the Glossary of Key Words. Future newsletters will include discussion of the relationship between HSC marks and the UAI, and the application of marking guidelines.

Sampling content and outcomes for HSC exams

HSC examination questions will directly address syllabus content and outcomes. Questions are constructed to enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved course outcomes.

In HSC examinations:

- demands of the questions are explicit;
- students are given a clear sense of what they need to show to earn high marks;
- different question types allow students to show what they know and can do.

An issue in setting exams for syllabuses with explicit content and outcomes is that any one examination cannot ask questions on all content areas and outcomes in one year.

For this reason, one of the Board's principles for setting examinations refers to a process of *representative sampling* to be used to select content and outcomes being examined in any one year and across a number of years.

The principle states that:

The examination will test a representative sample of the knowledge, understanding and skills outcomes in any given year. The intention of the examination in its formulation is to avoid predictability and encourage students to prepare for all syllabus outcomes ...

In complying with this principle, examination committees need to decide each year on the content and outcomes to be tested, taking into account the exams set in previous years. The application of this principle means that there is likely to be greater variation in the focus of examination questions from one exam to the next than there has been in the past.

School assessment will continue to complement the exams as a means of covering syllabus outcomes.

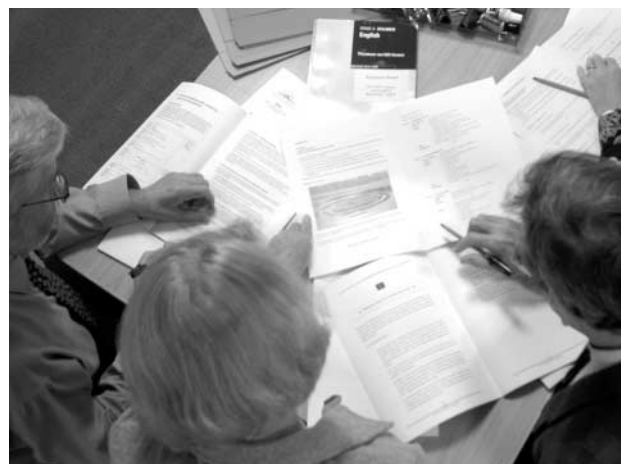
In his report, *Fair and Meaningful Measures?*, Professor Masters recognised the importance of ensuring that syllabus content is sampled in a balanced and representative way.

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It has been claimed that in 2001 some exam questions in subjects such as Ancient History assessed narrow and unrepresentative samples of syllabus content and outcomes, and that some questions placed undue emphasis on relatively minor aspects of the course.

This claim underlines the importance of getting the balance right between what might be legitimately expected in an examination and ensuring sufficient variability from one year to the next.

Masters has suggested that the challenge will be to ensure that HSC examinations focus on underpinning and central knowledge rather than peripheral and superficial detail.



The Board of Studies has added the following elements to its exam setting procedures to ensure that the representative sampling principle is applied effectively:

- extra guidance will be provided to the committees developing exams to ensure a representative sample of syllabus content and outcomes;
- mapping of each question against syllabus outcomes, content and performance descriptions will be closely monitored;
- the level of detail required by exam questions will be monitored;
- there will be extra checks on the adequacy of the sampling and on the level of detail assessed.

Adding to the HSC examination development process for 2002

In his review of the HSC exam program, Professor Masters noted that the process for setting examinations for the HSC was rigorous and comparable to best practice in other large examinations around the world.

The process involves detailed steps. Careful checks and balances have been built in to ensure a valid and reliable examination of each course.

Extra steps have been added for 2002 to ensure even greater consistency.

The diagram on page 3 outlines the steps in the examination setting process, including additional steps for 2002.

The process includes the following elements

- A practising teacher, expert in the subject, 'works' the paper and comments on whether students can complete it in the allocated time.
- The teacher also comments on the paper's relationship to the syllabus and the clarity of the language used.
- The Board Inspector checks the mapping of the questions and marking guidelines to syllabus outcomes. This ensures that all questions are within the scope of the syllabus.
- An assessment expert checks the paper and all marking guidelines to ensure they comply with the Board's principles for setting standards-referenced examinations.
- Papers are also given a plain English check by a copy editor before being sent for printing.

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- The Supervisor of Marking (SOM) for the paper checks the marking guidelines to see that they will provide adequate discrimination, reward the quality of answers appropriately, and provide reliable marking.

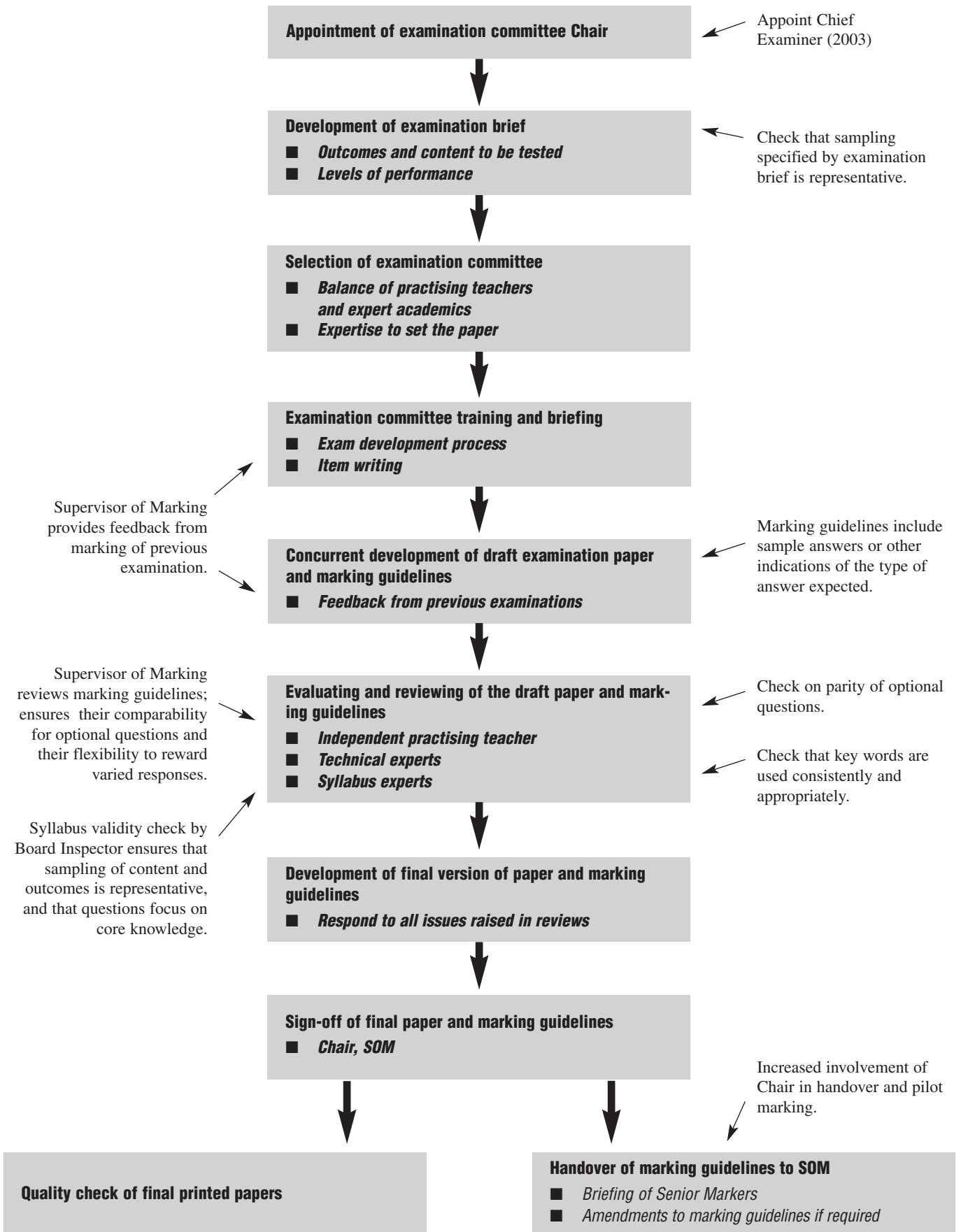
Extra processes for 2002

Following the Masters review and other evaluations of the 2001 examinations, new checks have been added to the process (see diagram annotations opposite).

- A specific check is now made on the representative nature of the outcomes and content that the paper samples. This is to ensure that the examination focus is on core syllabus content and the knowledge, skills and understanding that underpin it.
- A check is now made to identify and amend questions that are too narrow or too broad.
- Another extra check maps questions to syllabus outcomes and checks that where words from the Board's glossary are used, they are consistent with the outcomes and used appropriately. This is to ensure that the key words in the glossary do not conflict with the language of the subject.
- Exam committees are being given extra specialist assistance in developing optional questions to assure greater parity between them.
- The independent assessor is also being asked to identify optional questions that seem easier or harder than other optional questions.
- The SOM will now also check to ensure that marking guidelines allow comparable marks to be awarded to optional questions.
- The SOM will also review the marking guidelines to check that they are sufficiently flexible to reward a variety of student responses to questions.
- Steps will be in place to ensure that prior to marking, all chairs of examination committees fully brief all SOMs about the intention of questions and marking guidelines.
- During pilot marking, SOMs will look for and consider other possible variations on the type of answer required by the committee. This procedure should identify marking guidelines that are too narrow or too broad and ensure that quality 'left-field' answers can be appropriately rewarded.

Process for Developing Examinations and Marking Guidelines

(annotations indicate additions to the process in 2002)



Attention English Teachers

Support for English Extension 1 is now available on the Board's website
(www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc)

The *English Extension 1 Support Document* provides sample questions to assist in the teaching, learning and assessment of the English Extension Course 1.

It complements other sources of questions available from the specimen examination paper and the 2001 HSC examination.

The patterns and types of questions in this document, the specimen examination paper and 2001 examination paper are only indicative and not prescriptive of the types of questions that might be used in future examinations.

Call the Office of the Board of Studies Assessment Branch (02) 9367 8300 for further information.

Decisions by the Board of Studies at its May 2002 meeting

Replacement of the term 'bands' in the Higher School Certificate

After consultation with principals and teacher groups the Board has decided to retain the use of the term 'band' in the Higher School Certificate. The Board will prepare and distribute advice on the appropriate use of the term.

It also decided to continue to report the proportions of students achieving each standard of performance.

While the Board of Studies recognises the value of Professor Masters' advice about avoiding an overemphasis on bands, it accepts the good reasons put forward by principals and teachers for retaining the term.

Timelines for revision of Years 7–10 Mathematics and English syllabuses

The Board of Studies has decided that the timeline for implementation of the Years 7–10 Mathematics and English syllabuses will be amended, with implementation of these syllabuses now to begin in 2004. This will allow teachers to continue to focus this year on the second year of the new HSC courses.

The role of Chief Examiners

The Board has endorsed the roles and responsibilities of Chief Examiners for developing HSC exams from 2003. Details will be provided in a later newsletter.

Attention Ancient History Teachers

Improvements to the layout and instructions in the Ancient History examination paper

Changes have been made to the layout and instructions of the Ancient History HSC examination paper for 2002.

The intention is to make clear to students what the requirements are and to assist students in locating and choosing the questions relevant to the options they have studied.

The changes are as follows:

- Instructions for Section IV on the cover page have been amended to clearly relate Questions 45–63 to the Additional Historical Period, and Questions 64–76 to the Additional Ancient Society.
- A contents page has been included at the start of each section showing the page number for each optional question.
- Each section is in a separate booklet, and Section IV is in two booklets – one for Historical Periods and one for Ancient Societies.
- The Section II answer booklet will be attached to the back of the Section II question booklet.
- An instruction has been added at the start of Section II and Section III reminding students of the requirements for answering correct combinations of questions.
- A re-formatted version of the 2001 Ancient History HSC examination paper, showing the new features, has been placed on the Board's website. (www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc)

Newsletter 2, due in schools in early June, will include articles on:

- use of the Glossary of Key Words; and
- adjusting for varying difficulty levels of optional questions.