Examination Question Paper Development Process

This document details the production process for examination Question Papers.

Who is Involved?

The SQA member of staff who oversees Question Paper (QP) development and quality is the Qualifications Manager.

There are also a number of appointees involved who are teachers/lecturers with subject delivery expertise. These appointees include the Principal Assessor, Item Writers, Item Checkers, QP Reviewers and QP Validators.

Assessment Item Writing and Checking

Item Writers, who are subject specialists, are appointed to author questions and/or assessment tasks and associated marking instructions, to meet the requirements of given assessment item specifications. These questions and marking instructions, collectively known as 'items', are created within SQA’s secure content authoring system. Appointed Item Checkers review item content against the item specification, for accuracy, difficulty, accessibility (language and layout), allocated marks and appropriate marking instructions. Once approved, items are banked in SQA’s secure assessment item repository.

This activity can take place at any point during the year, and is not specifically scheduled.

Annual Activity to Develop a Question Paper

This activity to develop a Question Paper from the assessment bank is scheduled each year with several key milestones for activity completion during the period October to the February prior to the exam diet when the Question Paper will be used.

Question Paper Creation and Review

The process of developing a Question Paper for use in the next examination diet begins when the Principal Assessor (PA) for each subject/level selects a range of items from the item bank, to meet the requirements of the particular Question Paper specification.

This draft Question Paper is then subject to review by a number of appointed reviewers, who are subject specialists. Reviewers are tasked with considering the accuracy, balance and cohesiveness of the Question Paper, its match to the course assessment specification, and the consistency of application of national standards. Marking instructions and mark allocations are also considered.

Review activity includes:
- Validity - course coverage, sampling.
- Level - difficulty and discrimination.
- Accessibility - clarity, use of language, time allocation, layout.
- Equality and Inclusion - compliance with SQA guidelines in relation to all protected characteristics.

Once a reviewed draft Question Paper has been approved by the PA and Qualifications Manager (QM), it is house-styled prior to entering the next stage of quality assurance.
**Question Paper Validation**

The approved and house-styled draft is issued to an appointed validator, (in some cases, multiple validators), who has had no prior involvement in the development process. The validator considers the Question Paper from a candidate’s perspective, and provides comments with regard to practicality, layout, clarity of graphics/artwork, as well as validity, level, and equality and inclusion. Submitted comments are considered by the PA and QM, and any necessary amendments to the Question Paper approved.

**Final Proof Checking and QM Sign-off**

Following completion of any amendments as a result of Question Paper validation activity, the final draft Question Paper is issued to the QM, for final proof checking and approval to print. Following approval, the final Question Paper is submitted to the designated printer, for bulk production.

**Final Bulk Print Check**

The finalised Question Papers are printed in bulk by a secure printer. Once produced in bulk, a sample of the printed Question Paper is sent to the QM and PA for a final check and approval to use in the examination diet. If an error is spotted at this stage, which has potential to confuse candidates, or prevent them responding appropriately to the question, there are two options:

- Reprint the amended Question Paper.
- Issue a correction notice for communication to candidates by the invigilator, immediately prior to commencement of the exam.

Once approved for use in the examination diet, the bulk Question Papers are cleared for entry into the secure distribution process.

**Additional Activity Introduced for STEM Subjects from 2016 Diet**

**Pre-review**

For Mathematics and the Sciences the Question Paper creation and review stage is supplemented by additional subject specialist meetings to finalise the draft Question Paper. The agreed draft then progresses through review and validation activities as for all other subjects.

**Question Paper Validation**

Additional validators from the higher education sector have been appointed to consider the Question Paper and marking instructions from a more technical point of view.

**Senior Sign-off**

For 2017, the Head of Service for STEM is included in the validation activity and will provide, in conjunction with the QM, the final sign-off for print.