

Appendix 2

Additional Feedback on Appeals - Biology

December 2004

Many centres are not following the most recent advice given in the SQA publication “**Estimates, Absentees and External Assessment Appeals: guidance on evidence requirements April 2004**”. This document indicates that when compiling a prelim a minimum of three sources of past papers should be used and that questions should preferably be adapted. This applies to SQA past papers as well as past commercially produced papers. Centres should note that use of questions which are in the specimen paper will affect the reliability of assessment.

It has been noted that some centres use the same prelim every year and it must be recognised that this entails a security risk and therefore affects the reliability of the evidence generated.

In selecting questions from past papers, some centres do not include a sufficient number of A-type questions. It should be noted that there should be around 20 marks of A-type questions in Section B of Higher Biology; these include questions which require the candidate to describe or explain or account for a particular effect.

Centres should note that sets of questions or a complete section of questions (eg all of Section A or all of Section C) should not be lifted from any one source of past paper.

Care should be taken in the selection of questions set in a practical context especially where the source is pre year 2000. Prior to this date questions assessed compulsory practicals and as such related to knowledge and understanding of those practicals and not to assessment of the more generic practical problem solving skills defined in the current course arrangements documents.

In some cases questions assessing problem solving skills did not meet the required complexity of data which is also defined for each course in the arrangements document.

Care should be taken to ensure that the evidence submitted covers all aspects of the course. In particular, in setting a prelim, centres should ensure that the choice of questions in Section C extended response questions are from the same unit, as is the practice in the external examination. In some centre prelims, the choice is set up in such a way that a candidate could answer two questions on Unit 1 work. This results in the overall balance of evidence presented for that candidate to be inappropriate with insufficient evidence of performance at an appropriate level across all of the course.

In setting cut-off scores for prelims, some centres do not take account of the fact that the prelim only covers part of the course and may include some questions which the candidates may have seen before. It is advisable that cut-off scores which are higher than those used in the national examination are applied.

Centres should also take care in the selection of questions in the additional evidence ie that assessment which focuses on those aspects of the course not covered by the prelim. In some cases, there was unacceptable overlap in aspects assessed in the additional test and in the prelim. Some centres offer a second prelim later in the year which covers all three units. While this has the laudable aim of demonstrating performance across the course, it can result

in insufficient evidence of performance in the third unit across the package of evidence presented for appeal.

Some centres do not re-evaluate candidates' estimates after the assessment of the later part of the course. Centres should aggregate performance across the prelim and the additional evidence to determine the standard demonstrated. Centres should apply a realistic weighting to the different components; this will vary depending on the model used to generate the additional evidence.

Marking caused a problem in some centres with some evidence being submitted which was not marked and in other cases marking was lenient resulted in over-estimation of performance.

Centres should carefully consider the appropriateness of appeals for candidates who perform close to grade boundaries. Such borderline performance is unlikely to result in a successful appeal.