

2 August 2012

To: SQA Co-ordinator

**For the attention of all staff responsible for the delivery of
National Qualifications in Biology, Human Biology and Biotechnology**

Action by Recipient
Response required
✓ Note and pass on
None — update/information only

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Dear Colleague

National Qualifications Update — Biology, Human Biology and Biotechnology

1. Revised Biology and Human Biology Qualifications

a. Supporting documentation

The Arrangements document for Advanced Higher Biology (revised) was published in December 2011 and is available to download from the SQA website, along with a summary of consultation feedback and a FAQ document ([link to AH documents](#)). This course is available for implementation by early adopters in session 2012/13, with the first exam in 2013. A Specimen Question Paper and NABs are currently being produced for the course and will be published in due course.

Arrangements documents and Specimen Question Papers are available to download for the Higher Biology (revised) and Higher Human Biology (revised) courses from the subject specific webpages of the SQA website ([link to Biology documents](#)) ([link to Human Biology documents](#)). NABs are available to download from the secure SQA website. The first exam for the revised Higher courses was in May 2012 and the Question Papers and Marking Instructions will be available to download from SQA's past paper service in due course.

Education Scotland has produced a wide variety of teacher and candidate resources, including case studies, animations and videos to support the delivery of the revised courses. These can be found on the NQ Higher Sciences webpage of their website (www.educationscotland.gov.uk).

b. Session dates

The revised Higher and Advanced Higher courses will dual run with the current Higher and Advanced Higher courses in sessions 2012/2013, 2013/2014 and 2014/2015. The final exam for the revised Higher and Advanced Higher courses will be summer 2015.

c. Early adopting Centres

SQA requests that any Centre considering adopting the revised Higher Biology, Higher Human Biology or Advanced Higher Biology courses in session 2012/2013 informs the Qualification Manager as soon as possible (margot.mckerrell@sqa.org.uk). This is to ensure that adopting Centres are included in the support network.

2. Curriculum for Excellence

The Course Specifications, Course Assessment Specifications, Course Support Notes, Unit Specifications and Unit support notes have now been published for Access 3, National 4, National 5 and Higher Biology and for Higher Human Biology. Finalised Advanced Higher Biology documents will be published in session 2012/2013 ([link to CfE documents](#)).

The first examination for National 5 will be in summer 2014, for Higher it will be summer 2015 and for Advanced Higher summer 2016

3. Skills for Work courses

The Biology/Human Biology portfolio of courses includes Skills for Work courses in the Health Sector at Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2 levels. These courses offer opportunities for learners to acquire generic employability skills through a variety of practical experiences linked to the Health Sector. Arrangements documents, NABs and full teaching and learning support resources are available to download. SQA hosted a support network event for Skills for Work Health Sector; presentations and handouts from the event can be found on the subject specific Skills for Work section of the SQA website ([link to Skills for Work](#)).

4. Online Guidance Documents

a. External and Internal Assessment Reports

SQA annually publishes a range of guidance on both the external assessment performance and the evidence generated for internal assessment.

The External Assessment Report can be downloaded from the subject specific webpages of the SQA website. Individual reports provide information on the performance of candidates which should be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. Reports contain detailed information on areas where candidates performed well, areas which candidates found demanding, advice to Centres for the preparation of future candidates and statistical information, such as the grade boundaries applied for each grade in that particular examination. Over the past several years, the reports for the National Courses in Biology have included the questions contained within the examination that year which were intentionally demanding (A grade questions). It is hoped that this information will be useful to Centres when constructing prelims.

The Internal Assessment Report can also be downloaded from the subject specific webpages of the SQA website. This report is compiled based on the verification activity of biology courses. Reports contain general comments, information on areas of good practice and areas for improvement.

b. Estimates, Absentees and Assessment Appeals (EAAA)

There is detailed generic and subject specific guidance contained within the document *Estimates, Absentees and Assessment Appeals*. This document is available to download from the SQA website ([link to document](#)).

The following guidance is taken from this document and should be used when constructing prelims, marking prelims and gathering evidence to support an absentee or appeal:

Sources of questions – it is a requirement that centres identify the sources of the questions used in all evidence submitted to support an appeal, with the exception of a high-scoring NAB used to support an appeal at Grade C. When Centres are compiling their information on sources of questions, they should include information on where they have modified questions (for example 2002 Q22 (modified)). Centres should not identify modified questions as ‘Centre Devised’ unless the modifications are extensive enough to effectively make it a new question.

A commercially produced prelim paper, used in its entirety, must be the current year’s —Centres are reminded that SQA do not validate commercially produced papers. It is the responsibility of the Centre to check that the assessment instrument sufficiently replicates the Course assessment, is of an appropriate level of demand, has the correct balance of KU and PS and that the marking instructions mirror SQA marking standards/mark allocations. Centres should not assume that a commercially produced prelim is of a suitable standard even if the publishers include a statement to this effect.

A set of questions should not be lifted en bloc from a past paper — past paper includes both SQA and commercial sources. Whilst most Centres use a minimum of three sources as required, and mix and

match questions (making alterations where possible), there are some who use blocks of questions, for example all/most of the multiple choice questions from one past paper, all the essay questions from one past paper or the mini-prelim/additional evidence all from one paper, for example an SQA past paper or an old commercial paper. The use of blocks of questions from a past paper reduces the reliability of Centre evidence and should not be used.

Evidence from the latter part of the course — centres are reminded that, at all levels, there must be evidence covering all Units. In the case of Standard Grade, the evidence should cover all topics. This applies to absentee as well as appeals cases. Appeals for Grades A and B must include evidence for the latter part of the Course beyond the level of demand of the NAB.

Cut-off scores — it is the responsibility of the Centre to ensure cut-off scores are set appropriately and should take into account factors that affect the cut – offs. Setting the cut-off scores too low often gives unrealistic estimates and when the examiners judge the evidence for an absentee or appeals candidate, they find it is not compelling.

If the assessment instrument is less demanding, for example there are insufficient A Grade questions or the assessment instruments are split so that each assessment instrument tests only parts of the Course, then the cut-offs used should be raised. Using questions that candidates are likely to have seen without modification, for example questions contained in the most recent Past Paper book, is likely to make the estimate and evidence less reliable (see pages 22 and 24 of the EAAA document). If a high proportion of the questions used are ‘in the public domain’ then cut-off scores may need to be raised to account for this.

Examiners encounter a number of cases where the Centre has not aggregated the evidence submitted from a prelim and mini-prelim. Then, when the evidence is aggregated by the examiner, the overall level of attainment does not support the grade being appealed for.

Retention: insufficient tasks/questions requiring knowledge to be retained over an extended period of time — the various models or types of evidence that could be used are given in the EAAA Guidance document. The case for an appeal is often strengthened by the inclusion of questions/integration of work from earlier Units in later assessments.

Marking Instructions – Centres should ensure that Marking Instructions for prelims are applied in line with those published by SQA. Lenient marking may mean that cut –off scores applied by the Centre do not provide accurate estimates of performance.

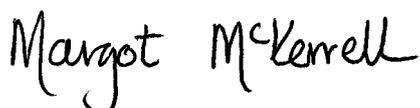
Appointments

SQA continues to rely on the support of teachers/lecturers to undertake a range of work. If you are interested in joining a marking or verification team, application forms are available from the Appointee section of the SQA website ([link to appointee management](#)).

Anyone interested in being involved in writing or vetting items for inclusion in national Question Papers, such as multiple choice questions, should express their interest by contacting the Qualification Manager.

If you require further information or clarification on any aspect of Biology, Biotechnology or Human Biology qualifications, please do not hesitate to contact either the Qualifications Manager (email margot.mckerrell@sqa.org.uk or phone 0845 213 5509) or the Qualifications Officer (email liz.sinclair@sqa.org.uk or phone 0845 213 5485).

Yours faithfully



Margot McKerrell

Qualification Manager