

20 December 2004

To: SQA Co-ordinator
Directors of Education
Biology Panel Members
Customer Accounts Managers

**For the attention of all staff responsible for the delivery of
National Qualifications in Biology**

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

Contact Name: Mary Hoey at Glasgow
Direct Line: 0141-242 2329
E-mail: mary.hoey@sqa.org.uk

Dear Colleague

National Qualifications Update – Biology, Human Biology, Biotechnology

This letter is intended to provide centres with an update on National Qualifications and should be passed to the member of staff responsible for Biology, Human Biology and Biotechnology.

1 Principal Assessor Reports for 2004

Principal Assessor Reports and Senior Moderator Reports for all NQ courses in Biology are available on the SQA website (www.sqa.org.uk).

The Principal Assessor Reports include details of statistical information on entries; grade boundaries at C, B and A; comments on candidate performance including areas where candidates performed well in the external assessment, where candidates had difficulty with the external assessment and areas of common misunderstanding.

When developing assessments used to provide estimates of candidate performance and evidence for appeals, centres should use this information on grade boundaries with caution together with the information on derived grades and on the success of previous appeals to help inform the determination of their own grade boundaries.

2 Senior Moderator Reports for 2004

The Senior Moderator Reports include general comments on central moderation and specific issues identified for the following areas:

- ◆ Standard Grade Biology Practical Abilities
- ◆ NQ Acc 3-AH levels Unit Assessment
- ◆ AH Biology Investigation (Unit Assessment).

Appendix 1 of this letter contains an extract from the Senior Moderators Report on the AH Investigations which details additional advice particularly in relation to assessment for Outcome 1- Develop a plan for an investigation.

One purpose of the investigation is to help promote good scientific practice and as such the 'daybook' should form a proper, working scientific document of the investigation undertaken by the candidate.

It is important that candidates appreciate that the 'daybook' or record of work forms the assessment for the unit. The evidence for unit achievement **must** be marked by the responsible teacher/lecturer and internal moderation is desirable, if resources permit. Successful centres had adopted a strategy of either marking on the 'daybook' when PCs had been passed or using the pro-forma provided in the NAB.

Retrospective moderation of the AH Investigation unit will take place in 2005.

Centres must note that candidates cannot submit the same investigation for both AH Biology and for AH Chemistry. Candidates who do so will incur a severe penalty.

3 Marking Instructions

The marking instructions for the Biology (Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, Higher and Advanced Higher Biology), Higher Human Biology, Intermediate 2 Biotechnology and Higher Biotechnology 2004 examinations are available on the SQA website.

4 Electronic Marking of Objective Tests

SQA has decided to adopt electronic marking of the objective test sections of examinations. This will be introduced in the 2005 diet of examinations for AH Biology, Higher Biology, Higher Human Biology, Intermediate 2 Biology, Intermediate 1 Biology as well as Intermediate 2 Biotechnology and Higher Biotechnology. This step is being introduced as part of SQA's continuing process of improvements and will mean that candidates will use a new format of answer sheet that will include their pre-printed personalised details. Exemplar materials showing the format of the answer sheets and the instructions for use will be distributed to all centres and posted on the SQA website. This will allow both centres and candidates to become familiar with the new format prior to sitting examinations. Further information is available on the SQA website and centres will be kept informed of progress via the 'NQ News' section.

5 Use of rough work sheets and additional answer sheets in examinations

In 2004 there was a change to the entry in the Invigilators Handbook with respect to rough work sheets due to an inconsistency in instructions in the rubric of the examinations being brought to our attention. This resulted in candidates' rough work sheets being collected in and returned to SQA with the answer booklets. This caused great inconvenience for markers and as a result the wording of the rubric on the front page of the answer books for 2005 onwards will be (only the relevant parts are indicated here):

*Additional space for answers will be found at the end of the book. If further space is required, supplementary sheets may be obtained from the invigilator and should be inserted inside the **front** cover of this book.*

Rough work, if any should be necessary, should be written in this book and then scored through when the fair copy is written. If further space is required, a supplementary sheet for rough work may be obtained from the invigilator.

The invigilators will be instructed to collect all rough work sheets and destroy them.

It has been noted that in a number of centres, candidates do not use the pages provided at the back of the answer books for additional responses, in particular responses to extended response questions and instead use supplementary answer sheets. Candidates should be encouraged to write all their answers on the pages provided in the answer booklets and only use supplementary answer sheets when they have used all of the available space. In the very unusual circumstance that candidates require to use supplementary answer sheets, they should be reminded that it is essential that they complete all the relevant information with respect to their name and candidate number to ensure that they are credited with any marks associated with their response.

6 Online Marking Materials

SQA has been leading the development of a new website which will explain how external assessments for National Qualifications are marked. This website is designed specifically for teachers/lecturers rather than pupils or parents and its aims are to explain the principles underlying the marking of assessment evidence and to develop, interactively, the user's skills in applying these principles to a selection of candidate responses. The website is scheduled to be launched nationally late in November 2004 with an initial group of around a dozen high-uptake subjects which includes Biology. Details of how to access the website can be obtained from your SQA coordinator.

7 Access 3 / Intermediate 1

A number of enquiries have been received relating to entries for Access 3/Intermediate 1 Biology. In particular what to do about candidates who have a number of unit passes at Intermediate 1 and a number of units at Access 3, or what to do about a candidate who passes all units at Intermediate 1 but then fails the exam.

Firstly queries regarding entries should normally be made through your SQA coordinator to the CAM (Customer Accounts Manager).

In cases where there is a hierarchy of units, such as between Access 3 and Intermediate 1, candidates can be resultated at either the level above or the level below the one they were originally entered for, on the results submission form. A candidate can therefore be resultated with a mixture of unit passes for different levels (note this does not apply where there is no hierarchy of units). If candidates have been entered for the Intermediate 1 course and they have not passed all the units at that level, the entry should be changed to Access 3.

Deadlines for submissions of entries can be found in the Operational Guide, which can be accessed on-line or from your SQA coordinator. One way round this is to make a dual entry at Access 3 and Intermediate 1 and then withdraw the candidate from one when you know which level they should be entered for, though centres must be aware that they will be charged for each course entry.

In the case of a candidate passing all units at Intermediate 1 and then failing the exam, the candidate will have the unit passes on their certificate, but in order to be credited with the Access 3 cluster they must be re-entered at this level and they would receive an amended certificate at a later date, with no requirement for re-assessment.

8 Appeals

Centres are referred to the SQA publication “**Estimates, Absentees and External Assessment Appeals: guidance on evidence requirements April 2004**”, which contains clear guidance on generating evidence.

Although the success rate for appeals increased for most levels of Biology this year, there was still a significant number of centres where the reason for an appeal failing was **incomplete evidence for the course**. It is important that when submitting appeals, the evidence demonstrates candidate attainment across the whole course; this is the case for Standard Grade as well as for National Qualifications at Intermediate 1 to AH levels. Centres are reminded that for an appeal for a grade C a **high scoring** NAB may be submitted as additional evidence, but this is not valid evidence to support an appeal at A or B where additional evidence assessing the course A grade description is required.

Centres are also reminded that only the current year’s commercial papers can be used in their entirety and there is an important caveat that centres must check the standard of these before using them. SQA does not validate commercially produced papers in any way. Unfortunately a significant number of centres did not follow the advice on use of commercial papers this year.

See Appendix 2 of this letter for further feedback on appeals evidence.

9 Review of Biology National Qualifications Courses

The Scottish Executive Ministerial response to the 3–18 Curriculum Review was published on 1 November 2004. The response stated:

‘A cycle of continuous updating and reform of the curriculum across all areas of learning will begin immediately, starting with the science curriculum 3–18’.

This is an important opportunity to take a fresh look at the NQ Biology courses (Access 3 to Advanced Higher). A Biology Subject Advisory Group has been set up to consider initial ideas and produce proposals for reviewing these courses, which will then be taken to a wider consultation. The work of the group is already underway and centres will be kept informed of progress via the update letters and the SQA website.

I hope the contents of this letter are helpful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further clarification.

Yours faithfully



Mary Hoey
Qualifications Manager
NQ Maths and Science Team