

Co-ordinator conferences for schools

A series of conferences have been organised at locations across Scotland for School Co-ordinators. Their purpose is to provide School Co-ordinators with an update on current progress towards diet 2003 and on SQA's plans to improve systems and access to information.

Dates and venues are:

Thursday 27 February	Craigmonie Hotel, Inverness
Tuesday 4 March	Ayr Racecourse, Ayrshire
Monday 10 March	Raddison Hotel, Glasgow
Wednesday 12 March	Murrayfield Conference Centre, Edinburgh
Thursday 13 March	West Park Centre, Dundee

In addition to the conferences arranged on the mainland, events are planned on Orkney, Shetland and Lewis during April. As there are so few centres on the islands, these will be combined events catering for schools, colleges and training providers. Dates and venues for the island events have still to be confirmed.

Workshops on National Qualifications for colleges

Our Customer Relations Managers (CRMs) have devised a workshop for colleges to provide staff with guidance and advice on the systems and procedures that apply to National Qualifications. The workshop has been piloted at Cardonald College and will be available for all colleges soon.

If you would be interested in finding out more, ask your CRM for more information.

SQA's five-year strategy published

In October 2002, SQA published its strategy for the next five years. Three main strategic focuses have been identified:

- ◆ **Qualifications:** to design, assess and quality assure qualifications that meet candidate and customer demand and are fit for purpose, relevant and credible.

- ◆ **Organisational management and viability:** to provide SQA with clear leadership, and with staff who feel empowered, are committed to continuous improvement, and who enjoy a high level of morale.
- ◆ **External activities:** to make SQA's delivery of qualifications efficient and up-to-date.

Information about candidates and qualifications will need to be accurate, accessible and easily managed by all those involved in the process, as appropriate.

For those interested, more details of SQA's five-year strategy can be found on the SQA website www.sqa.org.uk.

Changes to invigilation procedures

Some changes have been introduced this year to the appointment of invigilators and to the duties of chief invigilators.

As with most public sector posts that involve supervision of young people, invigilators will now have

to undergo a check through Disclosure Scotland before they are appointed, and appointments will be on the basis of a three-year contract.

Among other changes, the chief invigilator has been given greater

responsibility in allocating and advising invigilators of their duties. We hope the new arrangements will allow centres to take a team approach to invigilation and will give them more flexibility in allocating duties.

Exemplification of evidence for appeals

We have published some exemplar material for centres to help them in understanding the type, quantity and quality of evidence that will be accepted by examining teams in support of appeals.

The initial exemplification material is for Higher level in English, Mathematics, Music, Business Management and Physical Education, and Intermediate 2 level in Mathematics and Music. Copies of these materials will be issued to centres in February.

No mobile phones in examination rooms

Last year's exam diet saw an increase in reported incidents involving mobile phones ringing, or being stolen or broken during examinations.

Recently, we have been highlighting the requirement that candidates must not take phones into the examination room, explaining the potential consequences of breaching this rule (withdrawal of examination entry for candidates involved).

Entries and results

Centres submitted Course entries on target, and so the cumulative confirmation reports issued in December contained a full picture of entries for Diet 2003. Centres have now taken forward action, where needed, to make additional entries to complete Course profiles.

Your centre should now have reviewed its entry data in conjunction with candidate

activity, and should have made any level changes or withdrawals necessary. Unit results, where available, for all Units with completion dates of January 2003 or earlier should now be submitted.

Please note that by keeping data accurate we can ensure that various processes are effective – moderation; finalising numbers of markers and question papers;

and the production of forms that incorporate entry data (estimates, internal grades/marks and attendance registers).

The next cumulative confirmation reports and those detailing incomplete Course profiles will be issued in April, and will include data processed by SQA up to the end of March 2003.

Derived grades in 2003

As you will be aware, there will be changes in the derived grades procedure in 2003, both for Standard Grade and for other National Qualifications. The new rules are outlined here, and there are more details on our website www.sqa.org.uk.

Standard Grade

This rule is applied Element-by-Element in each subject.

Candidates achieving one or two grades below their estimate will be upgraded to this estimate if three conditions are met:

- ◆ there are at least six candidates with this estimate in the centre
- ◆ at least 60% of the centre's candidates with the same estimate have an external result equal to or one grade better than the estimate
- ◆ the candidate has taken the examination papers to which the estimate relates

The procedure does not apply to candidates estimated at grade 7 or for whom no estimate has been submitted.

One of the most prominent changes in Standard Grade is that an overall concordance factor will no longer be computed. Instead, awarding of derived grades will depend on the number of candidates and a percentage agreement, both of which will be computed for every estimated grade in Standard Grade separately.

Most of the questions we've received have been about the effect of these changes on centres with small numbers of candidates. In a centre where no single grade is estimated for more than five candidates, no candidate will be eligible for a derived grade, whatever their results. The reason for this is that any fewer than

six candidates with the same estimate is not thought to be a sufficient basis for automatic decisions. The centre would, of course, still be able to submit an appeal, which will ensure personal consideration of all evidence by an Examiner.

National Courses

This rule is applied to each combination of subject and level, eg Mathematics Higher.

Candidates one grade below their estimate will be upgraded to their estimated band if two conditions are met:

- ◆ there are at least six candidates with an estimated band at the same grade in the centre
- ◆ at least 60% of the centre's candidates with estimated bands at the same grade have achieved this grade

Just as in the appeals procedure, no changes will be made from one band to another within the same grade (for instance from band 2 to band 1).

The maximum improvement will be from the lowest band within a grade to the highest band in the next grade. For instance, if there are sufficient candidates estimated at grade B (band 3 or 4) and enough of these have achieved an external result in grade B, someone estimated at band 3, but achieving band 6, will receive a derived band 3.

Examination timetable for 2004

Any teacher who has been involved in setting a timetable in a school or college will appreciate how difficult the task can be. Setting the examination timetable is no different.

Where possible, national, local and other holidays are taken into account, and entry levels for the different subjects are monitored so that the risk of coincident examinations can be minimised. We also try to take account of requests from centres. However, given the large number of subjects and the short period into which all examinations must fit, some conflicts are inevitable.

Planning for the 2004 examination timetable is now underway and we have attempted to identify recent trends in uptake. An initial analysis of Course entries over the last two years has shown no evidence of significant changes in entry patterns, except for Science, where we can see some movement away from Standard Grade towards Intermediate 1. We will carry out further analysis to ensure all possible factors are considered, and we would like to hear the views of centres on timetable issues.

Given that we have detected no obvious shifts in entry patterns next year, we do not expect to make major changes to the timetable for 2004. However, we are aware that centres are looking at innovative uses of qualifications, and we will continue to monitor developments in entry patterns and adjust the timetable in future years if this is in the best interests of the majority of candidates.

If there is anything that you think we should take into account for the 2004 or future diets, please let us know. You can send your comments by post to: Tom Drake, General Manager National Qualifications, Scottish Qualifications Authority, Ironmills Road, Dalkeith, Midlothian EH22 1LE. Comments on the 2004 diet should be received no later than **31 March 2003**.

Update on openness

The last issue of *NQ Digest* included an article on what we are doing to make our processes more open. Here, we provide an update on two aspects of that work where things have moved forward in the last few months.

Availability of component marks

This year centres will be provided with the marks scored by their candidates in the externally-assessed components of some National Courses (to include, for example, English and Communication, and Art and Design). The interpretation and use of this information, along with the national mean for each component, will be piloted and evaluated.

Feedback on unsuccessful appeals

As in 2002, a feedback form will be sent to centres for all unsuccessful appeals detailing the factors that examining teams took into account when rejecting the appeal. The generic and subject specific statements on the form are being revised to take account of stakeholders' views.



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