

25 June 2004

To: Head of Centre
SQA Co-ordinator
Secondary Schools
Special Schools
FE Colleges
Education Authorities

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

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Dear Colleague

National Qualifications Review: Geography

At the recent series of Launch Events held in connection with this Review a number of questions were asked by delegates. As these questions varied from one meeting to another the supplementary information I provided varied from one venue to another. To ensure you are aware of the responses given to questions asked at all events the attached 'Question and Answer Brief' is provided to give as much additional information as possible about the implementation of the revised Units and Courses in Geography. This letter will also be posted on the Geography subject page of SQA's website (www.sqa.org.uk)

I hope that this is of assistance to you and remind you that should you require further advice or information about the implementation of the Units and Courses that I can be contacted as detailed above.

I have copied this circular to your SQA Co-ordinator for information.

Yours faithfully



Keith H Wright
Qualifications Manager Social Subjects

Encs

NQ REVIEW — GEOGRAPHY

Follow up to launch seminars — Wednesday 5 to Tuesday 11 May 2004

Questions and Answers

Structure and Content

General SQA issues

Q: Is it intended that Intermediate should replace Standard Grade?

A: A number of Education Authorities and centres are taking the decision to replace Standard Grade with Intermediate levels. Intermediate level was not designed to replace Standard Grade. When Intermediate levels were introduced the intention was that they would be benchmarked against General and Credit levels at Standard Grade. This means that the level of demands made on candidates should be equivalent for Intermediate 1 and 2 respectively.

The Scottish Executive has made a commitment in *‘Educating for Excellence’* to consult on the future of Age and Stage Regulations and to address the relationship between National Courses and Standard Grade.

Q: Does the new hierarchy make it easier for candidates to change level during a session?

A: Yes. Candidates who begin a session at Higher, for example, might gain a pass in the first two Units but fail the third Unit. They would only need to sit the Unit assessment for the failed Unit in the equivalent Unit at Intermediate 2. If they passed this and passed the Intermediate 2 exam they would be awarded the Course at Intermediate 2 but their certificate would show their Unit passes at Higher. These Units would not need to be passed again the following year if they had another attempt at the Higher.

Also, the closer relationship between the content across the levels makes it easier to create the situation in which candidates who drop a level will have less additional work on which they will need to catch up. Candidates who move up a level may require to cover additional content and skills, but this will depend on when they move and how the Courses have been planned.

Q: How late can I leave the decision to switch the level at which candidates are to be presented for the Course assessment?

A: This is something which will be influenced by candidates’ ability and how this develops as the Course is delivered. Appendix 2 of the Course Specifications gives advice about how Courses may be planned to delay this decision until quite late in the Course.

Centres/education authorities are charged fees for entering candidates for Units and Courses. There are penalty fees for late changes to original entries. Centres should have a note of these fees and the dates when excess charges are incurred.

Q: Does the Intermediate 2 Course contain more content than before?

A: It was the intention to ensure that the amount of content and skills would not be reduced from its existing level. Care was taken throughout the planning of the revised Course to ensure that candidates should not be overburdened with content. The level of demands placed on candidates is in accordance with that required at this level and ensures an equivalence to the demands made at Standard Grade Credit level Geography.

Q: Will there be a risk of candidates becoming bored with the repetitiveness of content between Intermediate 2 and Higher?

A: It is possible for candidates to be taught very similar content at both levels. This can be avoided if case studies and environmental interactions are selected carefully. In the Physical and Human Environments Units at Intermediate 2 much of the teaching is based around the use of case study examples. These case studies can be quite different from those taught at Higher level. In the Environmental Interactions Unit, if a centre is concerned about repetitiveness they can choose to teach a combination of interactions at both levels which avoid any repetition at all, eg European environmental inequalities and environmental hazards at Intermediate and rural land degradation and development and health at Higher. Where centres believe there is repetition between levels this might allow them to spend less time on these areas if candidates have previously been taught these thus freeing up more time to teach new topics or deliver the content in more innovative ways.

Q: Will candidates in centres where bi-level teaching is built in to the timetable have a very repetitive experience if they find themselves in the same class two years in a row as they progress from Intermediate 2 to Higher?

A: This is a decision for the centres. It may be that over a period of time resources on a number of case studies can be built up so some rotation can be introduced. Others may choose rotate environmental interactions.

Q: Now that Intermediate and Higher are more closely linked will this make it easier for managers to timetable the two levels in the same class?

A: One of the key actions in the Review was to improve the articulation between Intermediate 2 and Higher. This action came about as a result of criticism from centres that there was a lack of articulation. Subject specialists may consider that there are drawbacks to this pattern of timetabling and it would be up to them develop a response to such a move should they be opposed to this.

Q: How can centres be expected to implement the new Course by June/August 2004?

A: The biggest changes have been made to Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2 Courses and centres can choose either to run the existing Courses or revised Courses during session 2004/05. The changes at Higher and Advanced Higher are smaller, therefore centres are required to use the revised specifications during session 2004/2005.

In some centres where Intermediate is being delivered over two years implementation of the new Units will be necessary from August 2004. As a lot of the content remains unaltered these centres should have some time to plan for the introduction of the changed topics, eg the Physical Environments Unit is very similar to the existing Unit and all topics covered in the existing Global Issues Unit can still be taught if environmental interactions are carefully selected.

Q: Does the Intermediate Course still retain the breadth of the existing Course?

A: The breadth of the Course remains but it exists in a different way. Case studies can be used in the Physical and Human Environment units to provide interest and breadth. In the Environmental Interactions Unit breadth is retained/extended as candidates have to study two of these.

Q: Why have coasts been introduced at Higher when other landscapes types are already well resourced?

A: Consultation responses showed that there was some unease about the presence of scarp and vale in the Higher Course. Responses also showed a demand for the inclusion of coasts at this level and as this is in the existing Intermediate 2 Course it was appropriate to make this change both to meet perceived demand and to improve progression. The inclusion of coasts also gives greater validity to the teaching of vegetation succession on sand dunes.

Q: Why are the coastal features to be studied not listed in the lithosphere section of the Higher?

A: This is not how the content of the lithosphere is currently presented. The lithosphere should be taught within the context of the British Isles so any coastal feature typical of the British coastline could, in the same way that any features of glaciation and upland limestone, be examined. Landscape types beyond those covered at Intermediate 2 are likely to be assessed at Higher level.

Q: Will I still be able to teach the Dust Bowl as part of the topic on rural land degradation as rural change is now only post 1950.

A: Yes. There is no time limit set for studies in the Environmental Interactions Unit at Higher. The post-1950 reference applies only to the Human Environments Unit.

Assessments will not ask candidates about change prior to 1950 but any evidence presented by candidates in answers which use pre-1950 information to provide relevant background would receive credit.

Q: Will commercial resources be revised to take account of the changes?

A: This is not a decision for SQA but for the publishers. We have informed them that changes are being made to the Courses. The BBC already has an interactive website on seas, coasts and rivers for Intermediate 2. It will be broadcasting other programmes aimed at Intermediate 2 in the autumn term.

Q: Will the revised Units and Courses mean that I shall have to prepare a wide range of new resources?

A: No. Many of the existing resources will continue to be of use. Additional support materials produced by LTScotland are available to support those areas where there has been significant change.

Assessment

General issues

Q: Will the dates for completion of Units for moderation change?

A: No. Centres will require to guarantee the completion of one Unit at each level by **31 March**. The revised Units at Intermediate (Environmental Interactions) and at Advanced Higher this should make this easier to achieve.

Q: Can Specimen Papers be used in their entirety as prelim exams?

A: Specimen Papers are in the public domain as this allows candidates to see what a full external exam paper will look like. They should not, therefore, be used unaltered as a prelim if centres expect to use this evidence for appeal or to make estimates.

Q: Can candidates expect the range of questions provided in the Specimen Papers to be used in the external assessments?

A: Yes. However, the function of a Specimen Paper is to provide centres and candidates with as wide a variety as possible of the type of question which might be used in external assessment. In some cases there might be choice **within** a question in the Specimen Paper. This demonstrates that there could be choice of this type anywhere in the external assessment. Some questions in Specimen Papers may not seem to progress logically from the previous one. Again this stems from the desire to provide a range of both content and question type in Specimen Papers.

Q: Will further steps be taken by SQA to ensure that instructions on which questions candidates should attempt are clear on all Question Papers?

A: Yes. In light of feedback received from the Launch Seminars this will be looked at again.

Intermediate

Q: Will external assessment papers at Intermediate be ‘write on’ papers.

A: Intermediate 2 answers will be written in a separate answer booklet. For Intermediate 1 candidates will continue to answer on the question paper.

Q: Are the names used for the coastal areas and the glaciated uplands at Intermediate levels the only ones which will be accepted.

A: These are the terms which will be used in any assessments and these will refer to the areas shown on the maps in the Unit specifications. Candidates will be expected, therefore, to know these names. It is unlikely that the use of other name to describe these areas will be accepted. This allows for consistency in the marking of assessments.

Higher

No questions

Advanced Higher

Q: When will the folios for Advanced Higher have to be submitted to SQA?

A: The date for this is still under discussion. SQA publishes this information in its Operational Guide which should be in centres in August.

Q: Do candidates who fail the internal assessments at Advanced Higher need to be reassessed with a completely different assessment?

A: No. They can revise that part of their assessment which has been failed. This only applies at Advanced Higher. Failed candidates at other levels must use a completely different assessment instrument if they fail.

Q: Will centres receive information about candidate performance in the Geographical Study and the Geographical Issues parts of the folio?

A: It is not possible at present to make this information available as the two pieces of work are combined to create one component for Course assessment. The provision of marks for these pieces of work is not something that has been done previously. SQA is currently piloting the policy of releasing component marks (this will apply in Higher

and Intermediate 2 Geography in 2004) but is not yet in a position to be able to publish this more detailed type of information in any subject area.

Q: In what way do fieldwork note books contribute to the internal and external assessment of the Geographical Study Unit?

A: There is no requirement for candidates either to keep or submit a field work note book for either Unit or Course assessment. There is no expectation either at moderation or in the external assessment that these should be submitted. The Unit assessment required candidates to achieve Outcomes and Performance Criteria through the production of the Interim Report. However, appeals evidence submitted for external assessment would be aided if a record such as this was available.

Q: What is meant by the term ‘an aspect’ of a Geographical Study?

A: This is a small part of what could be a very much larger piece of work. It might be that part of a study on beach development which looks at pebble size along a transect of the beach. Alternatively it could be a traffic survey carried out as part of a Study into proposals to introduce traffic control measures.

Q: In the Geographical Study what is meant by the term ‘relevant fieldwork records’ which can be taken in to the write up of the Interim Report?

A: In this context relevant ‘fieldwork records’ are those which might show the planning, gathering and analysis of data which has been carried out. A ‘fieldwork record’ would not be expected to contain drafts of text that candidates might use for assessment purposes.

Q: Will centres be provided with exemplar materials for the Geographical Issues Unit and for the exam?

A: It is not intended to support these two areas of the Course with exemplar materials in the present distribution of support materials. Once ‘live’ examples of such materials become available consideration will be given to providing support in these areas. SQA is committed to improving the understanding of standards and there will be two seminars in autumn 2004 to address this issue at Higher level.

Q: Will the revised Unit assessment for the Geographical Issues Unit increase workload for teachers and lecturers?

A: This may be true for the assessment of the Unit, but as only one Issue essay requires to be completed for Course assessment, there will be less time devoted by members of staff to the supervision of this part of the Course. This should release time for marking the Unit assessment.

Q: Will candidates be able to cope with the assessment of the Geographical Issues Unit within one hour?

A: A pilot exercise which was carried out with these assessments indicated that they can manage this. Weaker candidates, who had received no prior training in the completion of this form of assessment, did have some difficulties. As with all Units, candidates should be fully prepared and familiar with the type of assessment they will face.

Q: What advice is available for marking the Unit assessment of the Geographical Issues?

A: No candidate should achieve a pass in the Unit if they fail to demonstrate competence in any single performance criteria. This marking requires a degree of subjectivity on behalf of the marker. The exemplification provided in the NAB should be of assistance. While many candidates will be trained to write their essays in a very logical format it

would be possible for a candidate to achieve a pass if there was evidence of the achievement of the performance criteria within the critical evaluation, eg the candidate may be drawing conclusions throughout their evaluation but fail to write a formal conclusion at the end.

Q: Why is there no Specimen Question paper for Advanced Higher?

A: The only change to the exam at Advanced Higher is in the number of marks allocated to questions in Section A. In this Section questions will be marked out of 30 instead of 20 although the nature of the questions will not alter. Because of this it is not necessary to provide a Specimen Question Paper.

Q: Is there a Course Assessment Specification for Advanced Higher?

A: Yes. This is on the 'Arrangements' section on the Geography page on SQA's website (www.sqa.org.uk).