

18 December 2007

To: SQA Co-ordinators
Secondary schools and FE colleges
Education authorities
HMIE

Response required ✓ Note and pass on Note — update/information only

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Dear Colleagues

National Qualifications update — Geography

This briefing note is intended to offer practical advice and support on the issues being raised by centre staff with SQA, and should be distributed to those staff responsible for Geography.

It contains information on the following:

1. Principal Assessor and Senior Verifier reports
2. Advanced Higher
 - a. Changes to the question paper
 - b. Changes to the Arrangements for the Folio
 - c. Geographical Issues NAB
 - d. Feedback on exam performance
3. Standard Grade
4. Higher Geography
 - a. Previously notified changes
 - b. Understanding Standards
5. Feedback on appeals
6. Intermediate 2 NABs

1. Principal Assessor and Senior Verifier reports

The above reports are now available on the Geography page of SQA's website (www.sqa.org.uk). It is recommended that those involved in the delivery of Geography Units and Courses take time to read through them as they contain useful feedback on the 2007 diet. This includes information about areas in which candidates performed well together with advice to centres about areas in which they found difficulties.

2 Advanced Higher

a) Changes to the question paper

For the 2009 diet of the exam and thereafter the examination at this level will be marked out of 60 instead of 50. The duration of the exam will be increased from 2 hours to 2 hours 30 minutes. It will no longer have a weighting of 1.2 applied to it. This will mean that the total marks for Folio (140 marks) will be added to the 60 mark question paper to give an overall total out of 200 marks. This will be divided by 2 to give a percentage mark.

The additional 10 marks will be in the form of a compulsory question added to the question paper from 2009 onwards. This new question will be contained in a new section — Section C — of the paper.

The question in the new Section C will be linked to the Unit on *Geographical Methods and Techniques*. It is not expected that this question will require candidates to have any additional knowledge of these techniques but it will provide an opportunity for them to demonstrate their understanding of some of the issues associated with their use. It will focus on the selection of appropriate techniques for specific studies, the practical application of fieldwork techniques and the techniques used to analyse data obtained from research. The question will be based around a scenario which might describe a fieldwork research idea or it might provide data collated from research and then seek comment on the techniques which might have been employed to gather and/or analyse this data.

Two specimen questions showing sample questions and marking instructions will be posted on the Geography page of SQA's website during January 2008.

The inclusion of this additional question, which has been discussed at length and approved by the Geography Assessment Panel, will remove the uncertainty which currently exists among centres and candidates about the importance of the question paper as part of the whole qualification. It will also mean that feedback on exam performance provided to centres will be more easily understood.

b) Changes to the Arrangements for the Folio

i. Removal of word count

Centres and examiners have recently been pointing out that the nature of diagrams being used, particularly in the presentation of qualitative information, makes it

very difficult to ascertain which parts of a piece of work should be counted when determining if candidates have kept within the word count limit. For this reason it has been decided that from diet 2009 the word count restriction which is applied to both the *Geographical Study* and the *Geographical Issues* essay will be removed. **The page count for both will continue to be rigorously applied.** Details on the application of the page count limit remains unchanged and can be found within the Advanced Higher Course specification on the Geography page of SQA's website (www.sqa.org.uk).

ii. Relationship between Geographical Issues topic and Higher Geography

To ensure that candidates are free to study the many issues which have a geographical dimension for their geographical issue, from the 2009 diet, their choice of issue need no longer be drawn from the environmental interactions listed in the Higher Geography Unit *Environmental Interactions* (DF44 12). The aim of this change is to extend rather than limit the range of issues candidates might choose to study. The revised requirement will be that the choice of issue should relate to one or more of the topics studied within the *Physical Environments* (DF3C 12) or the *Human Environments* (DF43 12) Units. This does not necessarily have to be linked specifically to one of the bullet points within the topics. For example, a candidate might study some geographical aspect of urban crime. This would come within the realm of the *Urban Geography* topic although it is not something which would be expected to appear as a specific theme in the assessment of this part of the syllabus. As all *Environmental Interaction* topics have links to these Units, essay themes which have traditionally been used will remain equally valid.

All the changes outlined above will be reflected in a revised version of the Advanced Higher Course specification which will be published on our website in spring 2008.

c) Geographical Issues NAB

As previously intimated in the June 2007 update letter a further NAB with six different case study examples will shortly be published on the secure area of SQA's website. The two existing NABs will be retained.

d) Feedback on exam performance

In August 2007 all centres received detailed feedback on the performance of candidates for each of the eight separate marking criteria used in the folio. This was made possible by the involvement of Advanced Higher Geography Markers in a pilot project aimed both at improving the quality assurance processes used by SQA to monitor Marker performance and to further improve feedback to centres on candidate performance. This pilot project operated in parallel to the normal Marker check procedure and the latter was used during the 2007 diet to confirm Marker performance. This session the pilot has been adjusted in such a way that it is better suited to assessments which, compared with criteria-based assessment used in Advanced Higher Geography, use a more objective approach to marking. SQA has considered very carefully the impact this new pilot might have on

Advanced Higher Geography and has decided to withdraw it from this pilot study this year. SQA appreciates the benefits centres may have gained from the return of detailed marks data made possible by the pilot project, but it would not be appropriate to include Advanced Higher Geography in the pilot for diet 2008. Centres will therefore only receive a single mark for the question paper and one further mark for the folio after the 2008 diet. For those subjects which are involved in the pilot in 2008 the traditional approach to Marker quality assurance will continue to be used in parallel to the pilot project. SQA remains committed to providing improved feedback to centres and it is hoped that Advanced Higher Geography will again be able to rejoin this project as soon as it is practical to do so.

3 Standard Grade Geography

For the 2008 diet there will be minor changes to wording of some types of questions to ensure that candidates have a clearer understanding of how they may choose to answer them, eg in the 2007 Credit paper, question 9 about tourism in Gambia asked candidates:

‘Do you agree with this statement?’

From 2008 a similar question might use slightly different language:

‘To what extent do you agree with this statement?’

or ‘Do you agree fully with this statement?’

This wording more closely reflects the marking instructions written for the papers.

4 Higher Geography

a) Previously notified changes

Centres are reminded about the information contained within the update letter issued in June 2007 which can be accessed on the Geography page of SQA’s website. This notes the following:

- ◆ The 2008 question paper will be out of 200 marks. The unit of marking will be single whole marks. Half marks will not be used at all in any part of the marking. Where half marks were awarded previously, whole single marks are now used. This system should be adopted for any marking of Unit or prelim assessment.
- ◆ There are minor additions to the Atmosphere and Hydrosphere sections of the Unit specification for the *Physical Environments* Unit. These will take effect from diet 2009.
- ◆ In the 2009 exam candidates will be able to select any two of the six environmental interactions in paper 2.

The changes outlined above will be reflected in a revised version of the Higher Course and *Physical Environments* Unit specifications which will be published on our website in spring 2008.

b) Understanding Standards

This website now has a revised page on it devoted to Higher Geography. On this page users can find generic advice about assessment at this level and an indication of key points to consider when preparing candidates for assessments. It also provides advice to teachers/lecturers who may be constructing assessment instruments. Users can also mark actual scripts written by candidates in the 2007 diet and compare their marks with those awarded by the examining team. A commentary about the marks awarded is also provided. This facility is an excellent professional development resource for teachers and lecturers. This was previously a password protected site but is now accessible directly from **www.understandingstandards.org.uk**, or the Geography page of SQA's website (**www.sqa.org.uk**).

This site also contains similar resources for Advanced Higher Geography, and for Intermediate 2 and Higher Travel and Tourism.

5 Feedback on appeals

Centres are reminded that guidance on constructing evidence for estimates, absentees and assessment appeals is now available both from SQA Co-ordinators and from SQA's website.

The folder *Guidance on Estimates, Absentees and Assessment Appeals* was issued to all centres in November 2007 and a slightly amended version of this for 2008 can be accessed from either the Services for centres homepage of SQA's website, or the Geography subject page. The wording for Geography has been amended to ensure consistency with other social subjects but the guidance information remains the same. This guidance folder is a key resource for centres to consult when gathering evidence for the above uses. It is vital that all teachers/lecturers wishing to submit evidence for absentees and assessment appeals should carefully follow both the specific information about Geography and the generic advice about the nature of evidence which is being used. Many appeals for the 2007 diet were unsuccessful as the evidence submitted did not meet the general or specific criteria contained in this guidance folder.

6 Intermediate 2 NABs

NABs which previously used half marks have been revised to ensure only whole marks are used in assessment and the updated versions available on the secure area of SQA's website.

I trust that this information is of use to you. Should you wish any further advice about the content of this letter please contact me as indicated above.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith Wright". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

Keith Wright
Qualifications Manager Social Subjects