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To: SQA Co-ordinator
Secondary schools and FE colleges

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

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Dear Colleague

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. Use of half marks in Higher
2. Evidence for Estimates and Appeals
3. Access 3: Geography and Social Subjects
4. Principal Assessors' and Senior Moderator's reports
5. Exemplification at Advanced Higher
6. OS Maps and their use in NABs

1. Use of half marks in Higher

SQA has a policy to remove the use of half marks in the approach to marking of candidate work. The policy brings a greater consistency of approach to marking across all subject areas and has the benefit of removing anomalies in the rounding of half marks.

A short life working group was set up by SQA in July 2006 to look at how this should be implemented within Geography, and in particular at Higher level. This group looked at the impact different marking models would have had on actual candidate achievement in the 2006 diet. Of the models tested — awarding whole marks for every second point only, awarding marks for what could be defined as 'developed points' and doubling all marks — the overwhelming conclusion reached was that the most appropriate way to eliminate half marks from Higher Geography would be to double all marks. This evidence was further discussed by the Geography Assessment Panel at its meeting in October 2006 and the Panel confirmed that this strategy should be adopted.

The following will therefore apply for the 2008 diet:

- ◆ all questions in the external assessment will be worth twice the number of marks currently awarded, eg what was formerly a six mark question will in future be marked out of 12
- ◆ paper 1 will be out of 100 and paper 2 will also be marked out of 100

There will be no other change to the marking instructions, ie where Markers previously ticked part of an answer to show the candidate had made a valid point and awarded ½ a mark, they should continue to tick these responses in exactly the same way but should award one (1) whole mark for every tick. Candidates will have to write no more or less in their answers than is currently required.

SQA will also amend the marking guidelines for NABs in exactly the same way. These revised marking guidelines will be placed on our website (www.sqa.org.uk) during the summer of 2007 and after that time all candidate work for both Unit and external assessment should be marked using whole marks only. The exemplification materials on the Understanding Standards website (www.understandingstandards.org.uk) will also be amended at this time. A revised copy of the 2007 exam paper showing how this change will affect the structure and marking of exams will also be placed on the website once the diet is concluded.

Centres should note, therefore, that in constructing prelim exams for the 2008 diet all questions candidates are asked to complete should, if selected from past papers, have the marks allocation doubled and the marking instructions amended to reflect this.

As previously stated, this change will take effect for all candidates for the **2008 exam diet**. Half marks should continue to be used for all assessments which are part of the 2007 diet.

Some of the NABs for Intermediate 2 continue to make some use of half marks. The marking instructions for those questions affected will be amended. Notice of these amendments will be sent to centres during the summer of 2007.

2. Evidence for Estimates and Appeals

a) Updated advice on Estimates, Absentees and Appeals

SQA has recently updated the *Estimates, Absentees and Assessment Appeals: Guidance on Evidence Requirements* document and this is now available on our website. A hard-copy is being issued to every centre. In particular, the document clarifies subject-specific requirement as well as guidance on the general principles for generating Estimates and submitting Appeals.

When generating Estimates and compiling evidence for Absentee consideration and Appeals, you should also refer to:

- ◆ Course Arrangements documents, which include Course grade descriptions
- ◆ Course assessment specifications
- ◆ SQA question papers, including specimen question papers
- ◆ SQA marking instructions
- ◆ Principal Assessor reports, which include information on grade boundaries
- ◆ exemplification materials

- ◆ any other relevant information (eg Course reports, subject update letters)

These materials, and more, are also available on the subject pages of our website (www.sqa.org.uk).

b) Records of candidate performance

A number of centres have recently been submitting copies of marks sheets, rank orders of candidates according to prelim performance and other similar data sheets with their Appeals evidence. The Appeals process is based on actual candidate work and evidence of this nature does not play a part in the Appeals process. Evidence such as this is not examined during Appeals and need not be submitted.

3. Access 3: Geography and Social Subjects

Centres are reminded that as from August 2006 a Course at Access 3 level has been available in Geography. This consists of a three Unit Course which articulates very closely with Intermediate 1. It has the same relationship with Intermediate 1 as currently exists between Intermediate 1 and 2, so is designed in such a way that it should be possible to deliver more than one level in the same class. There is no external assessment in Access Courses. Candidates who successfully complete all three Units in Access 3 Geography do not automatically receive the Course award. SQA Co-ordinators need to be alerted to this and they will be familiar with the registration procedures necessary to ensure the Course is also awarded to such candidates.

Access 3 Social Subjects continues to be available alongside the Course in Geography. As a result of feedback received from the profession the Arrangements document for this Course has been revised. More straightforward outcomes and evidence requirements and NABs have been written and these can be obtained from SQA's website (www.sqa.org.uk). The NABs are available on the secure area of SQA's website, which SQA Co-ordinators have access to.

4. Principal Assessors' and Senior Moderator's reports

SQA would like to encourage all centre staff responsible for Geography to read the reports of the Principal Assessors and Senior Moderator for session 2005/06 and the corresponding examination diet. These reports contain detailed and useful advice and information pertaining to candidate performance, guidance for centres and specific issues relating to individual examination questions and are available on the Geography page of SQA's website (www.sqa.org.uk).

In particular, the following areas of advice may be of use to centres:

Principal Assessor's report: Standard Grade

- ◆ candidates continue to fail to 'explain' when this is required
- ◆ centres are advised to ensure that candidates are given opportunities to discuss the type of responses required where the stem of a question asks for a particular skill to be shown
- ◆ there is tendency among some candidates to lift answers straight from resources without incorporating this information into a lengthier answer. At Credit level, in particular, candidates disadvantage themselves by doing this

- ◆ candidates should be encouraged to gauge the length of answer required by looking at the number of marks available

Principal Assessor's report: Intermediate 1 & 2

- ◆ there were high percentages of 'no awards' at both levels, and in particular at Intermediate 1
- ◆ centres should give careful consideration to the appropriateness of the levels at which they present candidates. The existence of an Access 3 Course in Geography from August 2006 (see above) may influence such decisions
- ◆ the same issues regarding 'explain' questions and lifting information from resources outlined for Standard Grade are found at these levels also

Principal Assessor's report: Higher

- ◆ candidate must read questions carefully and not simply look for trigger words before they commence their answers
- ◆ detailed knowledge of specific case study information is still missing in the work of many candidates
- ◆ some candidates failed to answer all the necessary questions. Practice at answering questions in the 'notional' time is recommended
- ◆ the Development and Health question is by far the most popular interaction studied but responses in this are often weaker than for other interactions. Centres might want to consider if other interactions may have more direct relevance to the domestic environment of their candidates

Principal Assessor's report: Advanced Higher

- ◆ the choice of topics for both the Study and the Folio is crucial. Very able candidates are likely to be best served by selecting topics which lend themselves to further development
- ◆ in Folio pieces, text should be fluent and effectively structured to provide a coherent piece of work
- ◆ inappropriate use of headings can fragment text
- ◆ where diagrams are used in the Essay they should be well used within the text
- ◆ map interpretation skills, particularly the selection of map evidence, remains weak
- ◆ candidates need to have a better understanding of the interpretation of data obtained from statistical tests

Senior Moderator's report

This report contains advice on key items Moderators look for when examining centre evidence. This illustrates the good practice which already takes place in many centres to ensure that there are robust internal quality assurance procedures in place.

5. Exemplification at Advanced Higher

The Understanding Standards website (www.understandingstandards.org.uk) will shortly have a section on this devoted to exemplification of standards at Advanced Higher level. This password protected site contains examples of candidates' work in the 2006 question paper, the Geographical Study and the Geographical Issues essay. For each of these a good 'A' pass

and a borderline response are used. Users of these materials will be able to mark candidate work, find out what the candidates actually scored and read a commentary from the Principal Assessor about the performance of these candidates.

6. **O.S. maps and their use in NABs**

Almost all centres currently choose to use the NABs available on the secure area of SQA's website for Unit assessment. This is to be expected and there is no intention that NABs will be withdrawn. However, NABs are provided as exemplars which show how evidence can be produced to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes in Units and centres are permitted to produce their own versions of Unit assessments. Where this is done the advice from SQA is that such assessment items be submitted to SQA's Assessment Standards section for prior verification.

In some cases, centres may find that they wish or require to substitute an alternative map with suitable modified questions for the one linked to the published NAB. This is a perfectly valid course of action and, where this is done, the above advice applies.

I hope that the notes above are of help to you. If you have any queries about these or any other related issues please contact me or Greg Storey, the Qualifications Officer in this area, at the details given above.

Yours faithfully



Keith H Wright
Qualifications Manager Social Subjects